KRISTY'S SURPRISE-PARTY

Olive Thorne Miller

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BY

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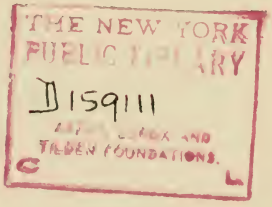
BOSTON
AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON,
MIFFLIN CO.

Published September, 1905



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CHAPTER I

KRISTY'S BIRTHDAY

Kristy was spending the day with her Aunt Lu. She had been all winter with her grandmother down in the village, and to-morrow she was going home to begin school again.

It was her birthday, and in honor of the occasion, she wore her prettiest white dress, and her daintiest blue ribbons, and at the moment my story begins, she was curled up on the bamboo lounge on the piazza reading a story. Kristy dearly loved stories.

She had not read her book half through, when, happening to look up, she saw several people coming up the path, for the summer cottage was in the woods, and there was no formal walk to it.

There were Aunt Lill, and Uncle Tom, and

Cousin Harry, and Mr. Coles, and several others.

Kristy was very much surprised. They were talking and laughing, and, what was queer, every single one of them had a small package in hand, tied up with bright ribbon like a Christmas package.

While Kristy was wondering what it meant, she remembered that Aunt Lu had acted very strangely all day. She had sent her out on the piazza, but had stayed in the house herself, and seemed to be very busy. Usually she sat out there all the afternoon, but to-day she had not been there at all. "Perhaps," thought Kristy, "she has invited company and not told me."

By this time the party had arrived and Aunt Lu came out to meet them. She gave them all seats on the piazza. Now this piazza was very different from others, and it should be called an out-of-doors parlor. It reached across the whole house, and was as wide as a big room. The house was far back from the road, and the piazza was furnished with chairs

and tables, and lounges, all made of wicker, so that rain would not hurt them, and there were books and magazines and papers, and Aunt Lu's work-basket, just as if it were a room in a house.

When the men were building it, they found a big tree right in the way. They were going to cut it down, but Aunt Lu could n't bear to have that done, and she had them build the piazza around it. So there it was coming up through the floor, and going out through the roof, with all its branches and green leaves spreading over the house.

Altogether it was more delightful in this out-of-door room than in any one in the house. Here Kristy could look out on every side into the deep woods, and hear the birds sing, and smell the sweet fresh air, and here she loved to stay.

When the guests were all seated, there came a little pause in the talk, and everybody seemed to be waiting for something. Then Miss Martin, the village music-teacher, spoke.

"Kristy, did I ever tell you how I came to

be a music-teacher and not a great musical artist as I wanted to be?"

"No," answered Kristy, rising; "I wish you would tell me: let us go out by the big chestnut-tree, where Uncle Tom has made a nice seat."

"There's no need to do that," said Miss Martin; "perhaps the company would like to hear it too."

There was a chorus of "Oh yes! let us hear it!" and Kristy sat down, delighted to hear the story, but wondering what made everybody look so smiling and act so queer.

Miss Martin then began.

CHAPTER II

AUNT DURGIN'S TEA

You never heard about Aunt Durgin's tea? Well, it was a very important tea to me; it was the turning-point of my whole life.

You see I was young, about sixteen, and Aunt Durgin was quite old and queer. She had plenty of money to live on, and do a good deal for us girls — a lot of us there were too. She was really fond of us, I know now; but she was so worrying, always lecturing us and finding fault, that we did n't love her very much, I 'm ashamed to say. Her money was in an annuity which ceased with her death, so what she did for us must be done during her life. Every year she gave some special advantage to one of her nieces; and it seems — though I did n't know it — that she had about decided to give me the benefit that year.

If I had known! — but it would n't have

made any difference; it took a shock to teach me.

I remember every moment of that day as if it were yesterday; the result of it seemed to burn every smallest event into my brain. I can even remember the pattern of forget-me-nots on the dress I wore.

Mother was going out that afternoon, and as she stood with her hand on the door, she said:

"Be sure to get to Aunt Durgin's in time."

"Oh, of course!" I answered carelessly.

"You know she 's very particular; and I 'm especially anxious to have you please her to-day," she went on.

"Why to-day more than usual?" I asked. "I've been trying to please her ever since I wore bibs; but I don't think I shall ever do it unless I get a charm to turn myself into an old woman at once."

"She 's more fond of you than you think," said my mother, — and I remember well how careworn she looked as she started down the steps, — "though she does n't show it."

"Humph! I should think not!" I said, standing in the door. "She names me but to — blame."

"Well, mind you give her no cause to-day," said Mother, opening the gate; "and oh! did you remember to get those pebbles off the roof for my Chinese lilies?"

"No, I forgot," I said, "but I'll do it before I go out;" and the gate and the door closed at the same instant.

"But I can't guess," I said, as I went slowly up the stairs again, "what's up to-night in particular."

With my mother's unusually serious injunction in mind, I went up to my room and laid out my one nice dress, to be sure that ruffles were all in order, and nothing should be wanting to delay me at the last minute. I even looked at my shoes to see that the buttons were all right; for Aunt Durgin had an eye like an eagle for anything out of place.

There were still two hours before it was time to dress, and those I intended to give to my practicing; for I had one "grand passion,"

and that was for music. My father — dear, impractical man that he was, with a soul full of poetry and music — lacked the "push" to get on in those days — or in these either, for that matter. So he spent his life trying to drill music into stupid pupils ; and of course, with his head in the clouds, he made little money. We were always poor, always needing something ; but, thanks to his gentleness and my mother's sweet disposition, we were always happy.

But I was ambitious. I was my father's best pupil, and at that moment the desire of my heart was for a year of lessons from a great master abroad. If I could only get the finishing touches from that master, and the *éclat* of his name (which goes a good way, you know), I felt sure I should march on to fame and to glory. Such was my modest opinion of my abilities ; and my thought by day and my dream by night was to bring this to pass.

But how to do it! There was the rub! When I think that if it had n't been for my own

carelessness — Well, well! let me tell my story straight.

At the end of my two hours' practice I closed the piano and started for my room to dress for Aunt Durgin's tea. On the way I remembered the Chinese lilies, so I passed on up to the roof, where there were always loose pebbles from the gravel. Above the third story was a low garret. As I reached up to unlock the trap-door from the third story into this attic, on which we had put a spring-lock after a burglar had scared us by coming down that way, there came into my mind, with almost ominous distinctness, my father's caution.

"Now remember," he said, "*never* go into the attic without putting something under the door, so that it can't fall and lock you out, whatever happens."

I paused. I had nothing to put under. I glanced around the attic; nothing was there. I should have to go downstairs, and I had no time to spare.

"I 'll be careful," I said to myself, "and it 'll be all right. Father 's fussy."

Thus thoughtlessly I settled my own fate, for heedlessness was my fault. *Was*, I say, for that night taught me something. But to go on.

I opened the door (it stood straight up), went out, and after a good look at the world from that elevated point, I collected a little basketful of stones, and reflecting that it was cooler than I thought, and I should have to wear a wrap to Aunt Durgin's, I went back to the trap-door.

I don't know how it happened; I suppose I had not opened the spring-door quite wide, and my jarring the roof started it, but suddenly it fell with a bang, pushing down the step-ladder by which I reached the roof. I could have jumped down into the attic, but I could not get back; and I thought it safer to stay on the roof, where I could attract somebody's attention.

My first thought was, "Dear me! if I should be late to Aunt Durgin's!" but the second was more serious: How was I going to arouse anybody? The only persons in the

house were my father giving a music-lesson in the back-parlor, and our one maid busy with her work in the kitchen. Every one knew I was going out to tea, and so no one would be surprised at my absence.

There was an old chair on the roof, for we sometimes went up there in warm evenings, and I sat down on it to think the matter over.

Then I began to find that it was very cool, and every little cold I took had a most annoying trick of settling in one tooth, distracting me with pain, and puffing up my face like a pumpkin. I took off my white apron and tied it over my head.

Then I went to work to rouse the household. In the attic, nearly under the trap-door, was a shelf, on which were packed away many things. I lay down on the roof, leaned over, and found I could reach it. First I pulled out a curtain-stick, and then I thought I was safe; I could surely make noise enough with that. I got up and pounded on the roof, and even on the skylight, hoping to attract somebody;

though I knew Biddy would n't come up for hours, and my father was so absent-minded that I had n't much hope he would notice it.

When I grew tired of that amusement, I went to my storehouse again, and this time pulled out an old fire-escape. It was a long piece of webbing that would reach to the ground, with a piece of iron in one end. Now I thought I could surely make somebody see. I dragged it to the edge of the roof at the back, and flung the end over, hoping that Father would see it dangle before the parlor window.

This had an effect, but it was on a row of tenement-houses on the street behind us. Women began to be interested in my proceedings. First one woman appeared at her window, hands resting on the sill, sleeves rolled up, and frouzy head stuck out, staring wonderingly at me. Then another window blossomed out with another frouzy head, and so it went on till I had as many as half a dozen staring at me in dumb amazement, — at least I suppose it was dumb, I could n't

hear anything. Then I began to wave my arms and beckon to them. They only stared the harder, and now and then one would look back into the room and then another head or two would appear beside her; but the idea that I was trying to communicate with them never seemed to occur to them.

Then a new thought struck me, and I began to walk back and forth and saw my fire-escape across the edge of the roof. I thought if Father saw something moving before his windows he must notice it. But not a word did I hear from that.

Then I tried the front, though I dreaded exposing my plight to the street. I might have spared myself the anxiety, for no one noticed me except some little boys playing in the gutter. I called, but I could not make them hear; I made motions to them, and now and then one would see me and point up, and two or three would stare a minute and then return to their play. I could n't make *them* understand that I wanted anything.

Up to this time I had been too excited to

get cold; but now I began to suffer. Once more I returned to my attic, and pulled out a piece of carpet. It was dusty and not overnice for a covering, but I could do no better, so I wrapped it around my shivering shoulders, and I must have looked more like a crazy creature than before.

Time was passing, too; it was already late; I was getting desperate. Should I have to stay here till Biddy came up to bed? I pounded more vigorously than ever. I shouted down the attic till I was hoarse, and at intervals I walked back and forth and sawed my fire-escape, till at last I flung it over, thinking Biddy *must* see it then.

All this time I had been reflecting; I was now much too late for Aunt Durgin's, and my mother's manner had impressed me with the importance of it. Whatever might be the consequences, I had no one to blame but myself; that was the hardest to bear.

It was growing dark; I began to be frightened. Suppose I should not be able to make them hear at all! Suppose I had to stay here

all night! The thought was a terror. The house was in a block; other doors opened from attics; people sometimes came out; even, as I knew to my cost, a burglar once entered through an empty house and went down through several scuttle-doors.

I began to feel a real panic; the thought of flinging myself over began to haunt me. That may seem foolish to you, perhaps; but try it once yourself, and if you can realize the hopelessness of making yourself heard by anything you can do, you will not be surprised that one gets nervous over it.

When I got wrought up to that pitch I chanced to notice three little boys in the yard of the tenement-houses, looking up at me. I beckoned to them eagerly. They were gamins; their street education had sharpened their wits; they comprehended that I wanted them. As one boy they nodded, and started on a run around the block.

Hope entered my heart once more. I went to the front. There they were, and with them — oh, blessed relief! — two policemen.

They saw me, and then they and the three boys, and sundry others who had collected, disappeared in our area. Then a long time passed, parleying with Biddy, I suppose, trying to make her let them in.

I was in agony. Ten minutes, which seemed like an hour, passed, and then, with a joy I never could have believed such a vision could inspire, I saw the head of a policeman above the garret roof.

But let me go back a little and tell how things went on in the house. About two hours after I had gone — as every one supposed — Biddy went up to her room to dress. She was startled by mysterious sounding knocks, and voices, as she thought. She knew no one was in the house except my father downstairs. She was superstitious; she ran down with a wild face, and met my mother in the hall. She declared that there were "spirits" upstairs, whispering, and knocking, and groaning.

My mother laughed at her, and went up to the third story. She too heard muffled knocks,

and what sounded like voices, which she could not account for nor locate. She went into all the rooms; she looked in every closet; she saw the spring-door closed, and she never thought of any one's being up there.

She was a little startled herself, though she did not think it was spirits, and she got Father up there. He went to please her, though he poohed and said it was nonsense, etc. When he got there the noises had stopped; probably that was when I was coaxing the street boys. So he said "Nonsense" more emphatically than ever, and came down.

When the two policemen with their clubs pounded on the door and demanded admittance, and Biddy went to the door, she was scared again; and they walked right in.

"What do you want?" asked my father, meeting them in the hall.

"We want the madwoman on your roof," they said.

"Good Heavens!" cried my mother, "a madwoman! That's what we heard! how could she have got there!"

They all went up the stairs in procession, the policemen leading.

When the door opened, and the head appeared above it — my relief, after the strain I had been under was so great that for the first time in my life I fainted away.

The policemen dragged me down some way, my head still tied up in the apron, and the old carpet trailing after me. They were about to carry me down the next flight, preparatory to carrying me off to the station, I suppose, when Mother happened to catch sight of my face.

She shrieked, "Why, it's my daughter!"

Of course she took me in charge, and the policemen turned upon the crowd who had followed in from the street, drove them out, and we were left alone.

When I came out of my faint, my nerves were all unstrung; I could n't control myself; I laughed, I cried, I could hardly tell my story. The whole thing seemed so absurd and ridiculous, to be a prisoner on one's own roof for hours. And yet it had somehow been so tragical to me.

More tragical indeed than I dreamed; for that very evening the blow fell. Mother dispatched Father at once to Aunt Durgin's to explain; but the answer he brought back was crushing.

Aunt had talked her plan over with my mother, made her promise secrecy, and invited me to tea, to talk it over and make her offer. It was — oh, it was — to have a year's study abroad! The one thing I wanted!

When I did not come, she thought it was because I did not want to be bothered to take tea with an old woman — she was always so suspicious; so she sent for Cousin Jane, who lived very near her, and made her the offer to go abroad. That was the news that Father brought.

Jane did n't want to study, so she had a year of travel, and Aunt Durgin died before the end of it. So you see, my dear, if I had n't been so careless *that once*, my life would have been very different, and I should n't have been a common music-teacher all my days.

As Miss Martin ended, she walked up to

Kristy, and laid the package she carried on a small table, where Kristy had laid the book she was reading when the guests arrived, saying quietly, "Here are a few more stories for the story-lover."

Before Kristy had time to thank Miss Martin, Cousin Harry broke in:

"That story reminds me of one I know — though I can hardly tell why," and he looked smilingly around at the company.

"Oh, tell it!" cried Kristy, charmed with this unusual willingness to tell stories, for which she usually had to beg and coax.

"Well," said Cousin Harry, "the chief merit of my story is that it is true. It happened when I was a small boy. I shall call it 'A Runaway Pie.'"

CHAPTER III

A RUNAWAY PIE

You would n't think a pie could run away. But it did, so that none of us could find it that night. To be sure, it was a chicken-pie, and had six legs of its own ; but it did n't use any of them, for they were all safely tucked away under the brown crust. But I 'll tell you how it was.

I was living with my grandmother, away up in the northern part of New York State, where the snow lies four or five feet deep all winter. For days and days Grandma and Joanna had been desperately busy with flour and eggs and butter and lard. And, at last, when results began to appear in the shape of piles of crisp doughnuts, rows of mince-pies, and loaves of cake, I found out that all this was preparation to visit Aunt Emma.

" Why, don't Aunt Emma have anything

to eat?" I asked, in horror, when Grandma told me that.

"Of course, she does," said Grandma. "But we 're going to surprise her, and we don't want her to spend the time of our visit in cooking. Her family is so small that she won't be prepared for four extra."

The last morning a large turkey was roasted to a golden brown, and the famous runaway pie made in a big yellow dish. After dinner Uncle John drove up with the big sleigh, and he and Grandma prepared to pack in the things.

The sleigh was not one of the new-fangled sort, with barely room for the feet. No, indeed! It was one of the real old-fashioned, generous kind, with boxes under the seats and all sorts of stowing-places.

After every nook was packed full, there still remained the chicken-pie.

"Oh! let me carry it. Please do, Grandma," said I.

"I 'm afraid you 'll drop it," said Grandma.

"I 'll be very careful. Besides, it 'll keep

my hands warm." For it had not been out of the oven long when Joanna tied it up in its brown paper cover.

At last she consented, and we all packed in — Grandma and I, with the precious pie, on the back seat, and Aunt Helen and Uncle John on the front seat. Warm robes and hot planks there were in plenty, for a sleigh-ride of fifteen miles in a winter afternoon is no joke.

Well, we had a splendid ride. The horses were so gay, the road was so smooth, and everything looked so beautiful under its robe of snow. The pie kept my hands warm, and I never thought of getting tired.

Grandma and Uncle John could not agree about the road. It was a long time since they had been over it in winter, and all such insignificant things as fences were covered up with snow. Uncle John was sure he was right, and Grandma was equally sure she was right. But Uncle John held the reins, so he took his road. Grandma said no more; but I saw the feeling of triumph swallow up her

anxiety at being out late, as night drew on and no sign of Aunt Emma's house appeared. The roads grew narrower and narrower, and at last ran square up to a pair of bars, showing that it was merely a wood road. Even Uncle John had to own that he must have missed the road somehow.

How to get out was the question now; for turning around with two frisky horses, and the road not wide enough to go ahead in, was clearly impossible, especially as the first step off the hard-beaten track would plunge the horses into a bed of soft snow, nearly as high as their heads and reaching two feet below the road.

I suggested backing out. But Uncle John laughed, and said he did n't think he could back two miles. At last he decided to unhitch the horses and turn the sleigh ourselves, getting the horses past it one at a time. So Uncle John took off the horses, and we all got out and stood in the snow. But our united efforts failed to move the great sleigh, and neither of us wanted to hold those lively

horses, who hardly ever had all four feet on the ground at once.

Dainty Aunt Helen said she was afraid to hold them. She knew they 'd bite. But Grandma came out in all her old-fashioned dignity.

"Nonsense, Helen! How foolish you are. I 'm not afraid to hold them."

So she stepped to their heads and bravely took hold of the bits; though I believe her soul quaked within her. Dear old Grandma. I shall never forget how she looked, hardly reaching their uneasy heads, and so light she would be instantly thrown down and trampled on, if they should start.

Uncle John did not feel very safe, I suspect; for he flopped that sleigh around in less than an instant, and hastened back to the horses. All was soon arranged then, and we prepared to pack in again. I turned to the bank where I had carefully deposited my precious pie, to take it up. But where was it? I could see nothing but a long, dark hole.

"Oh!" I cried, "where is the pie?"

Aunt Helen came and looked; but she could find nothing. And Uncle John ran his arm as far as he could reach into the hole; but could not find the runaway.

It was getting too dark to wait any longer for "any insignificant pie," Uncle John said; though, if it was not too far from Aunt Emma's, he would come over to-morrow and dig out the dish. So, bitterly reproaching myself for being so careless, I got into the sleigh, and off we started once more.

About ten o'clock we drove up to Aunt Emma's door. Of course, being in the country, they were all abed. But they got up, made tea for Grandma and supper for the rest of us, and spent half the night in talking and visiting.

The story of the runaway pie was told; and the next day Uncle John took a whole load of children over to the wood road, and with big wooden snow-shovels dug away the bank till he came to the pie, safe and sound on the ground, five or six feet from where I had set it down. The warmth of the bottom, added to

its own weight, had forced a passage for itself through the snow.

It was n't hurt a bit. And when Uncle John took a nice slice on his plate at dinner he admitted that it was n't so very "insignificant," after all.

When the story was finished, Cousin Harry too went up to the table beside Kristy, laid down his package with "More stories for the greedy girl — greedy of stories, I mean," — he added quickly, seeing a reproachful look on Kristy's face.

"Speaking of a snow-storm reminds me of a story I know," said Mrs. Anthony promptly.

"It happened in a prairie village away out West. Shall I tell it? Would you like to hear it?"

"Oh yes! Oh yes!" cried all the party, laughing as if it were some great joke.

By this time Kristy began to look rather sober. Though there was nothing she liked so well as stories, she had never seen people so very willing, even so anxious to tell them,

and she began to suspect there was some plot hidden under all this wonderful amiability.

But not noticing her, Mrs. Anthony went on, "It's the story of a fight, my dear hearers—"

Cries of "Oh! Oh!" from the audience. But Mrs. Anthony went on. "Don't interrupt! It's the story of a fight with a Western blizzard, and it is also perfectly true; it may be called 'Faith Kennedy's Fight.'"

CHAPTER IV

FAITH KENNEDY'S FIGHT

"I DO wish Father'd come!" said Faith Kennedy, peering anxiously out of the window down the road.

"Don't you go worrying about your Pa," said Aunt Lu, glancing up from her knitting; "he's well able to take care of himself."

"Of course he is!" said Faith indignantly; "I guess I know that! but no one can take care of himself in such a storm. He can't see where to go; the wind blows every way; and the snow — oh, it's like ice powder! I know, for when I went to the barn I could hardly find my way."

"Then I should think you'd better not go to the barn. It's no place for a young lady anyway," said her aunt calmly, drawing out a shining needle, and proceeding at once to knit it in again.

"It 's proper enough," said Faith with spirit, and turning away from the fast darkening window, "for me to see about my pet Molly, when perhaps I shan't be able to get to her in the morning."

"I don't see why you should n't be able to get to her in the morning, if the Lord spares your life till then," was the severe reply.

"Well, Aunt Lu, you don't know much about a blizzard, then," interrupted Harry, looking up from the sled-runner he was mending; "I should n't wonder if we could n't get to the barn again for two or three days!"

"Nonsense!" said his aunt, glaring at him over her spectacles; "mebby you think I 'm a fool!"

"Well," said Harry sulkily, "maybe you 'll have a chance to see! for I can tell you this is one of 'em, and no mistake!"

Faith walked uneasily to the window again, and laying her face against the glass, looked out.

Truly the scene was not encouraging; she

could not see two feet from the window. The atmosphere seemed to have resolved itself into billions of sharp particles of ice and snow which the rushing wind dashed against the glass as if it would break through. The road was not more than twenty feet away, but it might have been twenty miles for all she could see. While she looked, there came a sudden exclamation from Harry.

"Je-ru-sa-lem!" was what he said. Faith turned around. Harry stood as if petrified, holding in his hand a brass door-key, at which he stared in such a horror-stricken way that, in spite of her anxiety, Faith laughed.

"What's the matter with the key?" demanded Aunt Lu, who had just come from the East to preside over her brother's household, and found these two self-reliant young Westerners rather puzzling.

"Why! — why! it belongs to the schoolhouse;" stammered Harry, growing more and more uneasy.

"Well! what of it?" demanded Faith

sharply; "though to be sure I don't see what you have it for."

"Why — John and the boys, they — they — told me to unlock it — and I — I — the storm came on — and — "

"What under the canopy is the matter with that boy!" said Aunt Lu; "I believe he is bewitched."

But Faith walked straight up to him, for she saw that something serious was involved in his unusual hesitation.

"Harry Kennedy," she said in her clear young voice, "tell me all about it — this minute!"

"Why," he stammered, "the boys locked Margie Clark in the school-house — just for fun — and I lived nearest — and they gave me the key to let her out in a little while — and — and — " Here the boy, seeing the look of horror growing in his sister's face, began to whimper.

"Do you mean to say," cried Faith, "that poor little Margie Clark is locked up alone in the school-house?"

"I could n't help it! I forgot — I truly did," sobbed Harry.

"Good Heavens!" cried Faith excitedly, "that child! so nervous! afraid of her own shadow! such a night! she 'll go mad! Harry Kennedy, get your coat this minute; we must go and bring her away."

At this Harry, who was not very brave, began to cry harder than ever, and Aunt Lu interposed.

"But, Faith, if all you 've been telling me about the blizzard is true, it ain't overly safe for anybody to go out."

"Who said it was safe?" said Faith, her face growing white and set; "it 's a matter of life or death to get to the school-house, but I 'm going to that child."

"Faithy! Oh, don't!" begged Harry; "you 'll never get there! the drifts are awful in the lot this side."

Faith did not reply, but began bustling about with her preparations.

"Leastways," said Aunt Lu, "I sh'd think it would be proper to wait till your Pa comes."

"Proper!" came with an indescribable accent out of the young girl's set lips. "If any one thinks I 'm going to stay here and let that child suffer for the wicked pranks of my brother, then he does n't know me, that 's all. Harry, where 's your school-satchel?"

Hastily emptying the books from the bag, Faith passed out to the dining-room, where the table was laid for tea. Snatching some napkins, she wrapped up a plateful of bread and another of meat, to the consternation of old Dinah, who stared at her as if she 'd gone mad.

"You can get some more, Dinah," said Faith quietly; "I 'm going out, and I may need these. Do you know where the lantern is?"

"Del-law! gwine out in all this storm!" was all Dinah could gasp out.

Faith did not stop to reply, but went on speedily with her arrangements. She knew just what to do, for blizzards were not uncommon in her prairie home, and she had seen parties equip to face them. She found a small

hatchet, which with the heavy satchel she tied by a cord around her waist, so as not to have her hands encumbered. Into her pocket she slipped a ball of twine, a box of matches, and a candle; over her shoes she drew a pair of long woollen stockings. Then she scrambled into her cloak, tied on her hood, lighted the lantern, drew on her mittens, and went to the kitchen door.

All this time Dinah had stood speechless, but now she found her voice, and begged her young mistress not to tempt Providence by going out on such a dreadful night.

Faith impatiently bade her hush and remember the message to Papa when he came.

"Tell him I have gone to the school-house, and I shall stay there with Margie till they come for us;" and before another word could be spoken, she opened the door and passed out. Such a gust came in that she could not shut the door, and the old servant ran to make a last effort to detain her; but leaving the closing up to Dinah, Faith leaped off the steps, and in an instant was out of sight.

Hearing the door slam, Aunt Lu and Harry rushed out. "She did n't go!" they exclaimed in a breath.

"'Deed she did!" cried Dinah. "May the good Lord preserve her, for it 's the wildest storm I ever see — even in this-yer God-forsaken place."

"Well," said Aunt Lu grimly, "I did the best I could to prevent her going. I can't conceive that her father will countenance such a proceeding."

"'Deed, Miss Lu!" said Dinah, indignant at any blame cast upon her favorite, "her Pa 'll have 'casion to bless the Lord if she gits there alive. It 's a fearful thing she 's done, but Miss Faith allus was masterful."

And how about Faith?

The moment the kitchen door closed upon her she was as if she were blind; not one step could she see before her. The wind buffeted her from all sides, it appeared; the ice-shower cut her face like needles; it seemed as if all the powers of the air had descended upon her to sweep her out of existence. But she had

a clear plan in her head, and though she knew it was to be a struggle for life, she thought she could carry it out if she could reach the gate.

The first step from the door had been into a drift up to her waist; in floundering out of that she lost her bearings, and it was some time before she found the fence. More than once, even in that short time, she was tempted to give up and go back, but the thought of that delicate child alone nerved her to go on. When she did reach the fence she had to follow it a long way before she touched the gate; but at last she was out, and safely started in the right way. Breathless, covered with snow, shivering with cold, and blinded, although it was not yet quite dark, she started on her dreadful journey.

The school-house was not very far off, and fences reached nearly to it. Faith's plan was to keep her hand on the fences, for she well knew she could not follow the road a minute. But against the fences was the place for drifts to form, and just outside the gate she plunged into one almost over her head. Bravely she

fought her way, inch by inch, falling often, now blown against the fence with such force that she could not move, now beaten from the other side so she feared to lose her hold, her only guide in the world. At one time she fell head first into a soft drift that filled eyes and mouth in a moment, and flung away her lantern, which had blown out in the first minute; in the next moment she was holding down her skirts, which blew around her in the fierce gale. Many times she half lost consciousness and felt that she could not go another step, but spurred herself on by the thought of Margie.

Finally, after what seemed hours, she reached the end of the fences, and here she knew came her greatest danger. To go unguided to the school-house, which she could not see, beaten and blinded as she was, she well knew was not possible, and now came in the ball of string.

She pulled off her soaked mittens and beat her hands together to warm them so that she could use them; then she drew out the end

of the string, and after much bungling and many failures succeeded in tying it firmly to the fence. Leaving the ball in her pocket in case she fell, she kept a firm hold of the string, letting it slip through her fingers as she went on.

Now she left the fence and started out in the direction she thought the school-house to be. The use of the string was to enable her to find her way back to this starting-point if she did not go straight; and she found it of the utmost value. Without it she would, perhaps, never have found the building, and have perished miserably in a snow-drift, for six times she struggled the length of that string and reached nothing more solid than snow-banks. Then she painfully toiled back to the corner of the fence and began again. On the seventh time she stumbled over the step, and the next moment was fumbling at the lock with her stiff and benumbed fingers. It seemed an age before she stood inside with the door shut behind her.

This moment was almost the most danger-

ous she had passed, for, completely exhausted as she was, she was about to sink on the floor, but, rousing herself once more, she called feebly, "Margie!"

No one answered; it was perfectly dark, and a horrible fear that the child was in a swoon or even dead effectually roused her. She shook off the snow as well as she could, beat her hands a moment to restore the circulation, then pulled out her matches and candle and soon had a light.

Taking the precaution to tie the end of the string — her only clue to home and friends — to the door-handle, she passed into the school-room. This required some courage, for it loomed up big and dark, and her candle hardly lighted half a dozen feet.

Moreover, she was terribly frightened about the child. She called, she looked everywhere, but could find nothing. The room was cold; the thought struck her that perhaps Margie had got out and gone home long ago, and she had taken her terrible trip only to pass the night alone in this dismal place.

But just as she was giving up to this thought, she fancied she saw something dark over behind the last desk. She hurried across, and there under a bench seemed to be a bundle of clothes. She drew it out; it was the child!

Whether she were asleep or stunned, or just going mad, Faith could not make out. At first she was white, her eyes had no expression, and she seemed dazed. Then, as Faith shook her and spoke to her, life seemed to come, she screamed in terror and tried to run.

"Hush, Margie!" cried Faith. "Don't you know me? I'm Faith; and I've come to stay with you. I've brought you something to eat."

Then Margie clung to her and fell into convulsive sobbing, and it was some time before Faith could leave her a moment.

At length she calmed a little, and then Faith tried to cheer her up. She took off the satchel and gave her food, and then looked around for something to make a fire.

"Dear me!" she said in a minute, "the wood-box is empty!"

"Oh yes! and I got so cold!" sobbed Margie.

"Well, never mind," said Faith cheerfully; "we 'll soon have a fire. I 'll burn the wood-box itself! I 'm sure we need a new one." And she began to chop it to pieces with her hatchet. It was not long before the stove was stuffed with the dry wood, and in a minute or two a bright fire was roaring.

"Now we 'll make ourselves comfortable," said Faith, "for here we must stay till somebody comes after us." At this Margie's lip went up. "Never mind! I 'll tell you the loveliest stories! I know lots!"

This was comfort again. So Margie sat and munched her bread and meat, while Faith brought down the two big chairs from the platform, placed them before the fire, took off her cloak and hood, and tried to make herself at least partly dry. As soon as the fire was burning nicely, she opened the big stove door and let the cheerful glow fill the dreary little school-room.

"Now I 'll go and put the candle in the

window," she said, a good deal more hopefully than she felt, "so they'll be able to find us when they come."

These arrangements all made, she sat down in one of the big chairs, took Margie in her lap, and settled herself for a long waiting.

The child was nervous, and started at every shadow and sound. Faith told stories, the funniest she could think of, and sang songs, and worked every moment to keep her interested, though all the time she listened for some one to come to their relief.

The wind howled and moaned around the house; the fine snow sifted in around the loose windows and lay in little drifts on the floor. Time passed, and the brave girl talked and sang and tried to laugh, while her heart was crying, "Oh, where is Father? If he had got home, I know he would have come for me. Did he ever get home? Is he lost in the snow?" And then she would stop and listen, her very heart standing still, till Margie begged her to begin again.

This had gone on perhaps an hour, though

it seemed ten, when, in one of her pauses to listen, there came a new sound. It was as if something had been thrown against the door. Margie shrieked, "Oh, what is that!" and buried her face.

Faith, brave as she was, turned white in a moment, for there was something peculiar and unnatural about it; but she said, "I must see, dear!" and placed the child in a chair.

"Oh, don't go, Faith! I'm afraid!" she cried.

"But, Margie!" Faith urged, "you know it may be some one trying to find us. Perhaps it's your Papa. I must go. I won't be but a minute!"

Margie fell in a heap in the chair, and Faith snatched the candle from the window, placed it out of the draft, and opened the door. There she saw indistinctly a still figure lying across the steps.

"My God!" she cried in wild terror; "who are you? What do you want?"

No reply! Her first impulse was to slam and lock the door; the man was no doub.

dead. But in a moment her senses returned: she took hold of the arm, and by main strength drew the silent figure within the door. In doing so the hat fell off. The gray head was familiar. She shrieked, "O Father!"

Again she came near swooning on the floor, and again she roused herself. She dragged the helpless body to the fire; she brought snow to rub his ears and nose, which were frozen; she beat his hands; she worked madly though skillfully for several minutes before her father opened his eyes and showed that he was alive.

After that it was not long before he was himself again, able to hear her story and to tell his own. He had not been home at all; had been wandering around for hours, completely lost, and with just strength enough to struggle for the light which streamed out of the school-house.

"O Father!" cried Faith with white lips; "if I had n't been here! and had n't put that light in the window!"

"But you were here, dear, thanks to your

kind, brave heart," said her father, "and to that I owe my life."

They made no attempt to get out that night. Dr. Kennedy split up some of the benches to burn, and drew others up to the fire for beds, and after a tolerably hearty supper of cold meat and bread, they all stretched out before the blaze and tried to sleep.

In the morning came a shouting and anxious party, headed by Margie's father, who, after searching all night, had just found out where she had been left.

Dr. Kennedy rushed to the door and announced in a ringing shout that all was well, and in a moment the school-house was filled with men who looked as if they might have dropped out of Eskimo land. Within one pair of snow-covered arms Margie was sobbing, and suspicious sounds that came from that quarter hinted that her father was sobbing too.

The storm was now over, and while the men warmed themselves, the little school-room party wrapped up and prepared to go through the drifts to breakfast.

It was hard working their way, for there was no sign of a road, but at last Faith and her father walked in the kitchen door.

Faith was received into the arms of black Dinah, who had kept a fire and hot coffee all night, and was kissed and cried over by stiff Aunt Lu, who had paced the house all the hours in her distress, and had thoroughly learned what a Western blizzard is like.

As Mrs. Anthony went up to Kristy's table to lay her package beside the others, Mr. Coles began to speak. Mr. Coles was the gray-haired old clergyman of the village and a great favorite with Kristy, partly because he was such a good story-teller, but she had never before seen him eager to speak, and she wondered more than ever.

"That was the story of a brave girl," he said, "and I know of another quite as brave in another way. She did not have to fight a blizzard, but what is quite as dangerous — fire; that terrible fire that reduced Chicago to ashes more than thirty years ago, which not

one of you"— looking around on his audience — "can remember. Of course, you 'd like to hear it?" bowing to Kristy, who was so puzzled by this extraordinary mania for story-telling that she hardly heard him. She was wondering if they had all gone mad.

But the audience made up for her silence by hearty "Oh yes! tell it!" while smiles went round the circle. Mr. Coles smiled and began.

CHAPTER V

LOST IN THE FIRE

"O my God! how can I live and the city burning up?" groaned Mr. Lord, turning impatiently upon his pillow.

"But you are insured," said his wife, with pale face; "you will not lose everything."

"It is n't the office I care for," answered Mr. Lord, "but a package of papers, very valuable, intrusted to my care;" and he groaned again.

"But won t the safe protect them?" cried Mrs. Lord eagerly.

"That 's the worst of it," said Mr. Lord, in a voice husky with emotion. "They should be in the safe, but in my half-dazed state on the day I was taken ill, I neglected to put them there; they are in my desk, and the only comfort I have had, since I could think, was

that it has a good lock, and I have the key — but now!"

"Are they so very valuable, then?"

"So precious that if they are burned I shall be disgraced; it will be a dishonor if I am unable to produce them. It is unpardonable that I should not have secured them; it will kill me. I feel that it will! Oh! if I could only move! or Herbert were here!"

"Can't I do something?" eagerly asked his wife.

"No, indeed! From what Mr. Brown tells me the streets are filled with a mob; no lady would be safe in them for an instant. She would be robbed, if not worse. Herbert might perhaps find a way to get them, and to save his father's honor, if not also his life. I'm sure he would. Oh, how can I live and let them burn!"

Listening breathlessly with white face to this talk stood Grace Lord, who was just entering the room when her father spoke. A thought had crossed her mind, and a plan had grown in these few seconds.

"Why can't I save those papers?" was the thought, and "I will" was the conclusion, as her father ended.

Softly turning away from the open door, she stole back upstairs to her room.

"I can go as well as Bert," she whispered to herself. "I know where Papa keeps his keys, and I know just where his desk is in the office. I can run down there before Mamma misses me, and how happy Papa will be. He said the streets were not safe," was the next thought, "but he said a boy could go. I'll put on Bert's clothes," flashed into her mind.

Without stopping to think more about it, she ran into her brother's room, found an outgrown suit in his closet, slipped off her outer garments, and put on those, snatched a last year's hat from a shelf, and waiting only to get her father's keys out of a pocket in his clothes which hung in a hall-closet, she opened the street door, and was gone. It was a noble and generous impulse, but it was a fearful thing to do.

This happened in Chicago, during the terrible fire that burned that city thirty years ago. It was early on Monday morning; the South Side was already a roaring furnace, and the North Side, in which my story lies, was even then on fire.

When Grace turned the corner into a much used street, she was appalled, and for an instant turned back. It was filled with a crowd of people hurrying by, with fear, horror, and other strange passions in their faces. Some were loaded with household goods or treasures they hoped to save, others carrying screaming babies, or dragging children too frightened to run, and now and then two or three holding between them one too ill to stand. It was a terrible sight, a whole city flying for life, and a girl alone, however brave, might well be alarmed.

It was only for a moment, however. Grace thought of her father, and plunged into the street. The office was not more than half a mile, and her feet fairly flew, although everybody else was going the other way, and she

had to dodge between people and horses and loads of all sorts.

It was well she had not far to go, for the roof was just bursting into flame as she opened the door with her father's keys. His desk easily yielded to the peculiar key she knew so well, and among letters and papers lay a package she instinctively knew was the precious one, so carefully tied and sealed, so out of place it looked there.

Grace seized it, and started out, carefully locking the desk and putting the keys in her pocket, when the thought arose, "Where could she hide the package?"

You boys would say, in the inner breast-pocket of the vest. But there was no vest, at any rate Grace had none, and inner pockets were an unknown mystery to her. She thought an instant, then quietly slipped it down the back of her neck inside the clothes. The waist-band was tight for her, and she felt sure it was safe, and hastily ran into the street.

Things had changed greatly even in these few minutes. The tall blocks on both sides of

the street were on fire, a big building at the corner had fallen and cut off her return that way, while the air was full of smoke and cinders and heat that nearly suffocated her. Instead of the crowd she had seen, it was deserted: every one had fled for his life. Smothered, blinded, frightened, Grace turned to run — alas! away from home.

It was the only way she could go. At the first corner she found herself no longer alone, but one small atom of a moving mass of people. To turn the other way would have been like trying to stem a furious, rushing river, and besides, that way was thick smoke and fire. She was carried with the crowd, bewildered, lost, but even in that awful moment filled with joy that she had her father's papers.

The fire marched on with rapid strides, driving before it the multitude of homeless wanderers, among them our poor Grace. To the lake shore they went, and, as the hot breath of the flames followed them, even into the water far out as they could stand, till the water came up to their necks. Even there many were

suffocated, and quietly dropped into the water and were not missed. Grace went as far as she could and keep her head above water. She thought with a pang that the papers would be wet, but they were well tied, and anyway they would not be burned. So she tried to take comfort, though an awful fear had come upon her that she should never see her parents again.

Then, too, she remembered that no one knew she had gone, nor where to look for her, and though she had thought only of being brave, she found she had been foolish. "But the papers are safe, and Papa will be glad," was the thought that always came to comfort her despair.

At last, after hours of agony and terror and distress, with groans and cries and prayers in strange confusion, such as no one can imagine who did not pass through it, when many thought the world was burning up, and all had little hope of getting out alive, the fire burned itself out in that part of the city and swept on to the north.

It was late in the afternoon before the weary, hungry, fainting fugitives ventured to crawl out of the lake, wring what water they could from their clothes, and set out to find a spot on earth where was no fire, if such a spot there was.

Grace joined in the rush over the heated earth, water pouring from her clothes at first, but soon drying in the heat around her. Home and Papa's package was her only thought now, but where was home? As soon as she reached the pavements she saw that she was hopelessly lost. Where was Dearborn Street? Where Clark Street?

All was alike unrecognizable. Every house was burned, lamp-posts, street-signs, all leveled with the ground. She looked upon a smoking and steaming wilderness, and as she turned her face towards where her home should be, and saw the vast wall of fire marching steadily on, she knew she had no home in the world. And where, then, were Father and Mother! The awful desolation that swept over the poor little soul in that

terrible moment is something too painful for you to imagine. Be thankful that it is. She would have sunk under the weight of her despair but for the thought of the precious package. For that she moved on — "I must save it" her constant thought, "Papa will be dishonored without it;" and the poor tired feet hurried on she knew not where.

From that part of the city the only way of reaching the West Side, where was no fire, was over a certain bridge. Gradually the stream of people, of whom Grace was one, drew near that bridge, in whose narrow passage horrors were taking place all the time. The broad street had hardly room for flying people in wagons and carriages of every sort: when, then, the way grew narrow, there was terrible struggle for place. Heavy wagons piled high with furniture crashed ruthlessly into carriages of people; furniture fell and blocked the way; vehicles were disabled and abandoned; frightened horses let loose to trample at their pleasure; people with loads thrown down; feeble women pressed to the

wall. All the worst of human passions were let loose, and men became fiends in the mad struggle for safety and life.

As Grace reached this place, almost crushed in the crowd, a strong man behind her spoke kindly.

"My poor lad," he said, "you 'll be killed in that jam: hold on to me;" and with great difficulty he raised her above the crowd and stood her on the narrow rail next the water.

"Now hold on to me," he said, and went on, fighting his own way, while Grace, nearly dead with terror, and expecting every moment to fall into the water, held wildly to his neck. Once or twice she slipped, but his strong arm caught her, and at last, after hours, as it seemed to her, they reached the other side, and he lifted her down.

"My boy," he said kindly, "you look delicate to be alone in this mad crowd; won't you come with me?"

Oh, how Grace longed to do so, but fear restrained her. He thought she was a boy,

and she could not explain, because it might endanger the precious package.

"Oh, no!" she said hastily, "I must find Papa; but I thank you more than I can say for helping me over that bridge," shuddering as she spoke.

"Yes, little man," said her friend, "you 'd hardly have come over alive if I had n't seen you."

"Papa 'll thank you too," began Grace; and then, fearful that he or some one would suspect she had valuables, she turned hastily and ran down a side street.

But where should she go? That was the West Side, and free from fire, but she had never been there, knew no one, and the streets were full of flying people. She could only go with them, for they all seemed going one way.

So they were; and after a long walk, in which she many times nearly fell with fatigue, she reached the end of her journey, the place where half a city was collected in misery and despair. It was a wide, bare prairie, with hundreds — yes, thousands of people, some with

a houseful of furniture and goods, some with nothing in the world but their night-clothes, camped down to wait for—they knew not what.

That scene cannot be described. Grace sank exhausted on the ground, and very likely would never have arisen, for she was wet and cold, tired and hungry. But although everything in life seemed gone, kind hearts were not burned up, and near her happened to be a motherly German woman, who had saved all the furniture of her little house by means of her husband's express-wagon, and was now guarding it and her three children, while her husband was making a hundred dollars a load drawing rich men's treasures to a place of safety. The good frau had already made a fire in her little stove and heated some water, preparatory to cooking supper, and seeing Grace apparently dying, hurried about and made her a cup of good strong coffee. She could not speak a word of English, but she doubtless saved Grace's life.

After drinking the cupful, which gave her new strength, the poor child buried her face

in her hands and burst into uncontrollable tears, with sobs and moans that touched the warm-hearted woman. She tried to question her; she made her come to her fire; she at last forced her to lie down, wrapped in one of her own coarse blankets.

There, on that desolate prairie, with rain falling, groans and cries of pain and distress around her, aching in every bone of her body, poor Grace Lord passed that awful night.

A little sleep did wonders to refresh her, and with the light of morning came hope, though there seemed little to build it upon. Thousands were rousing to a fresh sense of their own desolation, families mourning the loss of one of their number who had died during the night, many grieving for children separated in the crowds, all remembering homes, comforts, blessings, forever lost.

With dawn, wagons from the unburned part of the city, and filled with food, began to arrive, sent by kind hearts which remembered the hosts of homeless fellow creatures. Bread, meat, and coffee were distributed, and Grace

— thanks to her friend the German woman — received a large roll.

But a new uneasiness, or rather the old one, began to creep over her; fear that this woman might try to detain her, might suspect the treasure she bore. Although with many pangs at the apparent thanklessness of the act, she took occasion, while her friend was absent, to slip away and turn once more towards town. She had heard that all the churches and school-houses were thrown open to the homeless, and she must start on her search for Papa and Mamma. First, however, she stole softly around the groups on the prairie, fearing, yet almost hoping, to find them there.

Misery, sickness, death, insanity, troubles of all sorts she saw, but not a face that she knew; and bravely once more she started on the road to what was left of the city.

All that day long she walked, weary, foot-sore, nearly crazy, inquiring her way to churches and school-houses, and going through every one that she found.

"I'm looking for my papa, who's sick."

opened all doors to her. Eagerly, almost wildly, as the hours went by, she peered into the faces of the crowd. She ate something — she knew not what; somebody made her sit down and eat and drink; somebody said kind words in her ear; somebody took off her soaked and ruined shoes, and put on a pair that were dry, though coarse; somebody tried to take off her jacket to dry it, for it was soaking with last night's rain. But fear of discovery aroused her. She tore away with a cry, and ran many blocks before she dared to look around to see if she were pursued.

Just as it began to grow dark Grace — who had all day heard dreadful tales of suffering and death, of people burned up, and people dying of exposure — was settling into belief that she no longer had father or mother, that she should all her life be a tramp and a beggar, and that all her sufferings had not after all saved her dear papa, for whose sake she had braved everything. Just at this lowest point of her courage, her eyes fell upon a familiar face coming out of a church.

"O Maggie!" she cried, with her heart on her lips, "where's my papa?"

"An' who are ye, thin?" asked the tidy Irish girl. "I don't know ye, boy."

"O Maggie! I'm Grace! I'm not a boy; I have on Bert's clothes." Here she whispered: "I — I — I went to get something for Papa."

"Faith, thin! I do believe it's Miss Grace hersilf; but I niver should ha' known her! Holy Mother! won't they be wild, just?" and seizing one arm of Grace with a grip like iron, she started off with rapid strides towards the suburbs.

"But, Maggie, tell me, are they safe? Do you know anything about them, Maggie?" with a cry so full of agony that the good-hearted though rough girl stopped.

"Well, yis, thin; they're safe and sound in me brother's bit house on the prairie. They could n't git no place to stay. Your pa was carried in a wagon, and I and the Missis rode with the driver. We could n't git any place, an' so I made bold to speak of me brother, who has a spare bed — so he has. So

they went there, glad enough to git a roof over their heads. But ain't they just wild about you! Your pa was out o' his sinses all night, an' your ma walked the house like a mad cretur. I 'm out now — have been all day — trying to find you. And why, thin, I 'd like to know, did ye run away that black day?"

But Grace could not answer. Relief and joy, added to her sufferings, were too much. She had fainted dead away.

About eight o'clock that evening there stole into the back door of an Irishman's shanty on the prairie a neat Irish girl, half dragging, half carrying, the deathlike figure of a boy, ragged, forlorn, hatless, miserable; he looked like one of the worst vagabonds of city life.

Mrs. Lord was warming something at the fire, and looking so old and changed that Grace hardly knew her. At sight of Maggie she looked up eagerly, but seeing her companion she fell back with a moan.

"O my God! you haven't found her, then?"

"Thin ye don't know her, Missis? No more did I; but look again!"

Another and closer look, and mother and child were in each other's arms.

Good news travels as fast as bad, and in one minute more Grace was in the arms of her father, and such a scene of tears and sobs and groans and cries, may it never be your lot to see.

When all were calm, and Grace was warmed and fed and bathed, and dressed in some clothes of Maggie's, in which she looked like an overgrown doll; and when the precious package, which had so nearly cost the lives of Grace and her father, was found to be not destroyed by its soaking, — Grace told her story, or what she could of it. Much of it she could not recall, and never again could she be induced to repeat it, so full of horror it was.

All through the dismal tale she was interrupted by her mother's tears and sobs, and her father's words, more precious than gold, "Brave girl! Little daughter! My darling!

Brave little woman!" and ending with a long embrace, and the last word of all:

"Little woman, you have saved your father's honor and his life! You have been a hero. Herbert — had he been a man — could not have done more; I doubt if he could have done so much."

When Mr. Coles had finished and turned to lay his package on the pile beside Kristy, she suddenly burst out excitedly:

"Now I know! this is a Surprise Party!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Anthony; "to see if we could n't surprise you as you did us last Christmas."

"To get even with you for the trick you played us," said Cousin Harry.

"We have been thirsting for our revenge ever since," added Uncle Tom.

"Well; it 's a lovely revenge, just like you, Uncle Tom," said Kristy joyfully; "but you overdid it. I did n't give you a splendid pile of books," fondly passing her hand over them.

"But you gave us doughnuts and cider, and they 're enough sight better than story-books."

Groans and cries of dissent greeted this remark, but a twinkle in his eyes showed that he did n't half mean it, and how could he, since he wrote story-books himself?

Now that Kristy had solved the mystery, she was prepared to listen and even to insist that each one should tell his story, and to enjoy them as she had on the other occasion, when she surprised them.

"It seems to me your stories are all about wonderful girls — brave and so nice — " said Mr. Roberts. "Now, I know a girl of another sort; more like the girls we s- — read about," he added quickly. "This was a naughty girl, but — well; I won't tell the end before the beginning — you 'll see;" and seating himself comfortably on the lounge beside Kristy he began:

"It opens with a discussion between a mother and daughter."

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEER FAMILY NEXT DOOR

"Well, you can do as you please, Mamma, but *I* shall call upon them," said Stella Walters, with a defiant toss of the head.

"But, my dear," her mother remonstrated, gently, "you know nothing about them."

"I know that they 've taken the Stuart house, furnished it splendidly, and had the grounds put in beautiful order. I know they're very stylish, and there 's a young lady in the family; and our neighborhood is so stupid and poky, I should think you 'd be glad to have me make pleasant friends."

"You know I am glad," answered Mrs. Walters, "but I can't think it safe to make acquaintances you know absolutely nothing about. They come here without letters of introduction, — that we know of, — and they attend no church."

"What do I care where they come from!" Stella burst out scornfully, "or where they go to church! or whether their grandfather sold soap! I know they look nice, they live in a beautiful place, and have plenty of money, and I 'm not going to be tied down by any old-fogy notions about 'family connections,' or any such stuff."

"But," went on Mrs. Walters, "there is certainly something queer about them. They keep no servants, — that we have seen, — and the gentlemen are often at home all day, as though they had no business; besides, no one ever calls upon them, and they scarcely ever go out."

"Just as if that were a crime! Why, you scarcely ever go out yourself, and they have no calls probably because they 're strangers, and most people are so cowardly that they dare n't call until they have been introduced, and know what Mrs. Grundy has to say about them. I hate such things."

It was plain that the more she said, the more determined Stella became; so Mrs. Wal-

ters made no reply. It was years since she had been able to control her daughter, and it seemed quite too late to attempt it now.

As soon as Stella finished the flower she was embroidering, she left the room. In a few moments her mother heard her ring the bell for her maid, and she knew that Stella was dressing.

After a while she saw the self-willed girl, in her most elegant calling costume, taking her way to the gate of the Stuart place, which was the next house to their own.

Stella slowly walked up the long approach to the grand house, revolving in her mind whom she should call for, — since she did not know the name of the family, — and admiring the beauty of the freshly decorated grounds.

"It 's queer that the outside door should not be open," she thought, as she went up the broad steps and rang the bell.

Several minutes passed, and there was no response. She rang again. She heard a blind opened very softly from above, and in a few moments steps came to the door. Keys were

turned, chains let down, and the door opened slowly and with apparent caution.

A stout-looking middle-aged woman, with her sleeves rolled up and flour on her apron, stood there.

"What did you want, Miss?" she asked shortly.

"I want to see the ladies," answered Stella haughtily. "I came to call on them," she added, as the woman seemed to expect something more.

"Oh!" said the woman. "I 'll speak to them;" and she closed the door and went away.

"What rudeness!" thought Stella, with burning face. "No doubt she 's a stupid country thing. I should n't think they 'd keep her."

But now the door opened again. "You are to send up your name," was the message she received.

"Well, I declare!" thought Stella, feeling insulted, and half inclined to go home without calling; "the ladies are as queer

as the servant, — but perhaps they are foreigners."

That thought quieted her rising indignation, and she waited, after sending up her card, till the rough servant came again, opened the door, and asked her in.

The parlor into which she was shown was furnished in a costly and flashy manner, though it was so dark she could scarcely see.

"Dear me!" she thought; "this is dismal enough! I don't see how they can bear to be so shut up, the grounds are so pretty to look out on. But what lovely things they have!" she thought, looking eagerly around at the fine furnishings.

After a few minutes, without having heard a sound, she suddenly became conscious that a lady stood in the door, looking intently at her. The blood rushed to her face, as though she had been caught stealing; though when she came to think of it afterwards, she saw that it was the lady who should have blushed.

"I beg your pardon!" she stammered; "I did not hear you had come in, and I was

noticing how beautifully you have fixed up the old house."

On this the lady came forward slowly, called her by name, asked her to be seated, and sat down herself, but in an uneasy manner, as though she expected to hear some business.

She was a very pretty woman, about thirty years of age, dressed in a silk and lace morning dress; but she had an anxious expression that surprised Stella, in the midst of so much luxury.

Stella chatted away of neighborhood affairs; of how pleasant that the old house, which had stood empty a year, was taken at last; expressed a hope that they would be neighborly, and so on.

Gradually the lady seemed to grow more at ease, and after a while she took part in the conversation, and began to ask questions, — very politely, but after all rather searching ones, as Stella remembered afterwards.

Who lives on the other side of us? How many gentlemen are there in the house? Was her mother able to go out? and where was her

father? Had they any trouble in getting good servants? and how many did they keep?

These were asked in such a ladylike way that Stella innocently answered everything, and told her all about herself, her family affairs, and all that she knew about the neighbors.

At last, to Stella's surprise, she found she had been in the house an hour, and then she asked for the young lady. "Your sister, I presume," she added politely.

The lady — who, Stella had learned, was Mrs. Keenan by her mentioning her husband's name — said she would speak to her. She was not her sister, but a friend, — Miss Anderson, — and she would introduce her with pleasure.

"Excuse my not calling a servant," she said, as she was leaving the room. "The truth is that we hate the whole race, and we only keep one in the house. They are so ignorant, and such a meddlesome, tattling set!"

"They are, indeed!" said Stella heartily, though at the same time she wondered how

they could get along in that large house with only one servant.

After some minutes Mrs. Keenan returned and introduced Miss Anderson, whom Stella found a bold-faced, loud-talking girl. But she, too, wore a costly dress, diamonds in her ears, and a hand loaded with expensive rings.

Diamonds, fine jewelry, and rich dresses covered up a multitude of shortcomings with the thoughtless girl, and she soon forgot her first unpleasant impression of Miss Anderson, and was talking with her like an old friend.

Another hour passed away rapidly, for they soon became very familiar, and then Stella rose to depart, promising to come again soon.

"We go out very little," said they, "and you must visit for both."

"But I shall drag you out," was Stella's last laughing remark, as she went down the steps.

"Well, Mamma, they're splendid!" she announced, as she entered the sitting-room. "Mrs. Keenan is just lovely, and her dress must have cost two or three hundred dollars

at the very least. It was trimmed with lovely real lace. The house is perfectly splendid, — ever so much nicer than when the Stuarts had it, — and Miss Anderson has diamonds enough to fit out half a dozen people.

"It's grand over there, and I'm glad I went. I'm going to ask Miss Anderson to drive out with me to-morrow. Her name's Annie. Is n't it sweet? — Annie Anderson! It sounds like a made-up name. I like her ever so much."

So she ran on, while Mrs. Walters listened anxiously.

"Are they strangers in town?" she asked at last, when Stella was obliged to stop for breath.

"I declare! I forgot to ask," said Stella, remembering suddenly that, much as they had talked, the conversation had been all about herself and her affairs, and the neighbors generally, and not a word about themselves. With the exception of their names, she really knew as little about them as before she went.

The next day was bright, and Stella had her

pretty new phaeton brought up, and invited Miss Anderson to drive. The invitation was accepted, and from that day sprang up an intimacy between the two girls. Stella seemed to be fascinated.

She, however, did most of the visiting. It was only after much persuasion that Miss Anderson — Annie, as she called her after the first day — called upon Stella. When she did make the call, she seemed to take an interest in everything, admired all she saw, and asked many questions about the house and family.

Stella took her to her own room, showed her her jewelry and clothes. Then they talked about silver, and Stella showed her an antique tea-urn, an heirloom in her mother's family. It was locked up in a safe which had been put into the house since Mr. Walters's death, and none of the servants knew about it.

Before long, Stella visited at the Stuart house every day, and though Mrs. Walters did not know it, she became acquainted with Mr. Keenan and Mr. Anderson, Annie's bro-

ther. Nearly every time she went there, she saw them.

Mr. Anderson was a singer and player, and Mr. Keenan played chess and other games. They had duets, and chess-playing, tableaux, and charades and games, and costly lunches and dinners; and though the tables were served and furnished in a careless, hodge-podge sort of a way, the viands were the richest and most expensive the markets afforded. The one servant was a good common cook, and pastries, creams, confectionery, and fruits came every day from the best city caterers.

The odd things in their life had long ago ceased to trouble Stella. In fact, they never had troubled her much. The family was to her simply eccentric, different from the rest of the world, and, of course, better.

Why should n't people do as they liked? Why should everybody think he must do just as his neighbor did? She was young and willful and thoughtless, and believed in independence. So she saw nothing amiss in the Keenans.

Mrs. Walters was concerned at first; but

after a few weeks of Stella's intimacy had passed, she concluded it was merely a girl-friendship for Miss Anderson, and gave the matter but little thought. She, too, thought the family "queer," — a kind of people that all properly trained persons know are not desirable acquaintances, though they may be harmless.

Mrs. Walters did not suspect that the two gentlemen of the family were almost always at home. Stella only mentioned them occasionally. She did not think it best to tell how much she saw of them, knowing well that if her mother knew of this phase of her visits, she would not approve of it.

Stella always went with fancy work or a new piece of music in her hands, and Mrs. Walters did not notice that the work did not progress much. Besides, just at this time, she was much occupied with cares in her own house.

She had had a succession of losses in the most unaccountable way; silver spoons, money, table-linen, jewelry, seemed fairly to melt out of the house.

She discharged two or three servants, locked her closets and drawers with the greatest care, and yet one thing after another would disappear, till not a place in the house seemed secure except the safe.

At last, events came to a climax. One night when John — the only man in the house — was away, the house was robbed. Every bit of silver, rich linen, and fine clothing was taken; even the safe was emptied of its treasures.

Mrs. Walters was greatly disturbed. She at once set detectives to work on the case. Meanwhile, the intimacy went on next door, and Stella had news to tell every time she went to the Stuart house.

It was about this time that she began to be conscious that she was watched by some one. The same man's face, though in different dress, was continually confronting her, and looking sharply at her. At first she thought it very romantic, and made a lively story out of it to laugh at over at the Keenans, but to her surprise, they did not laugh, but seemed concerned, and asked many questions.

This aroused her indignation against the unknown, and she began to feel annoyed; but, pleased or vexed, it was all the same: still she saw the man wherever she went.

She did not tell her mother; in fact, she hardly talked to her mother now about herself, or what she did. She feared, if she should tell her, it would abridge her liberty of going out whenever and wherever she chose, and annoy her still more than being watched.

One morning Stella had been obliged to go to the city, to make some purchases. She was gone some hours, and when she came back was preparing to go to her friends, when her mother said:

"Stella, the Keenans have all gone out to drive."

"I guess not," said Stella carelessly.

"But they have," persisted Mrs. Walters, "for I saw them, and another gentleman was with them."

"Well," said Stella, with affected indifference, looking at her watch, "I 'll go over and get a book I left there, and if they have not

yet returned, of course I'll come home to lunch;" and off she went.

The grape-arbor was on the other side of the house, and slowly Stella turned her steps towards it.

When she reached it the pretty little summer-house was vacant, though a book lay on the seat, as though it had been occupied. She sat down and opened the book. It was one of Mr. Anderson's favorite authors. She read awhile, but finding that it grew late, she finally went up to the house.

She rang. No one came to the door. She knocked, — a peculiar knock that Mr. Anderson had taught her, and which always brought some one in a moment. Still no response. After walking around the house, and finding everything shut and locked, even to the kitchen, she came to the unwelcome conclusion that her mother was right, that they were all gone.

With a burning face she turned her steps towards home, and not once again that day did she look towards the house, pleasing

herself with imagining their wonder at her absence.

The morning brought a thunderbolt.

"Why, Stella!" cried Mrs. Walters, on opening the morning paper, and seeing on the first page a sensational-looking article, with large-type headings, "they've found a nest of burglars in our city! — on our street!" she went on, as she eagerly scanned the headings.

"Where?" asked Stella languidly, helping herself to a roll, as her mother became absorbed in reading.

"Why — why —" stammered Mrs. Walters, too amazed to be able to command language, "it's — it's — the Stuart house! — it's the Keenans! Tom Keenan, the paper says, and Bill Anderson! Long known to the police! Have been watching them for weeks! Have secured evidence that will be sure to convict them! Were arrested yesterday with two women, and a servant who turns out to be the mother of Anderson!"

"It's an infamous lie!" shouted Stella, pale as death, rising from the table. But

though she thus branded it on her first impulse, there immediately rushed into her mind scores of proofs of its truth. Their singularities, their shut-up life, their bolted doors and windows, their entire leisure during the day, and their haste to close up at night, their hatred of tattling servants, and their curious questions.

In spite of her protest and long before her mother had finished the column, Stella knew in her heart that it was true.

Mrs. Walters went on, reading by snatches a faithful description of the house, its elegant furnishing, an account of the previous life of the two men, a description of the women ; of the arrest, of the robberies they had been engaged in, — including their own, — at which a rush of recollections overwhelmed Stella. But the worst for Stella was yet to come.

In the midst of the excitement the bell rang, and two officers came in for the purpose of summoning Miss Stella Walters, as an intimate and one of the witnesses necessary to convict the prisoners of their crime.

This was the climax! Tears and agonies and prayers at this disgrace had no effect on the iron men of the law.

While this was going on, one of the men, looking around the room, chanced to see on the table a photograph.

"By George! that's lucky!" he exclaimed in surprise, pocketing the piece of cardboard.

The family were in too much consternation at the time to think or care what it meant, but they learned afterwards that the prisoner Anderson, when requested to sit for his photograph, to adorn the walls of the station-house, in what is called the "Rogues' Gallery," utterly refused. When compelled to sit, he distorted his features so that he could not be recognized.

The interposition of influential gentlemen of Mrs. Walters's acquaintance procured for the broken-spirited girl a private examination.

With close questioning she told her foolish and weak story from the beginning. Poor Mrs. Walters was inexpressibly shocked.

It was not yet evening, but the whole life of Stella Walters was changed. Mortified to agony, disgraced forever, — as she felt that she was, by the arrest and the exaggerated account of her confession, which appeared in big type in all the papers, — the headstrong, pleasure-seeking girl was entirely crushed, and a reserved, silent, almost timid woman took her place. She fell into a sort of apathy; would never go out of the house, nor see a friend; she seemed always on the watch for some terror, and suspicious of everybody that looked at her.

Mrs. Walters feared she would become insane, and, by advice of her physician, shut up her house and took her abroad. Years of travel and constant change of scene removed that danger, but nothing could ever make Stella Walters young or gay again. The shock had been too great, her spirit seemed actually crushed out of her, and she was a wreck of herself.

Several years later, when Mrs. Walters and Stella had returned and settled in a distant

part of the same city, for Mrs. Walters did not dare to return to the old place, they chanced one day to be on a Hudson River Railroad train, which stopped at Sing Sing. While they waited, a gang of prisoners chained together was marched to the train to be transferred from the prison in that town to Auburn. One of the men looked up, and Stella, looking idly on, caught his eye. To her horror, in spite of all the changes, she recognized Mr. Anderson, and at the same instant he recognized her.

A horrid grin spread over his features — which she had once thought so noble; he snatched off his prison cap, and bowed to her with some of his old grace, while the people in the car looked around curiously, and Stella — for the second time in her life — fainted dead away.

As the story ended, Kristy drew a long breath.

"Well, she got well paid, didn't she?"

But Aunt Jane began seriously.

"Girls who do not respect their mother generally suffer. I will tell you about a girl who did mind her mother, and what happened to her."

"I'm afraid that'll be a horrid story," whispered Kristy to Mr. Roberts, as he laid his book on the growing pile beside her.

"I guess not," he answered. "Minding one's mother is usually a wise thing to do."

"Oh, I did n't mean that," explained Kristy eagerly; "I meant Aunt Jane is so very, very —" But while she hesitated for a word, the story began.

CHAPTER VII

LAURA'S LESSON

"MOTHER! Mother!" exclaimed Laura, bursting open the door of the sitting-room, and tossing her school-books on the table, "our class ranked first in examination, and what do you think Mr. Sabin is going to do?"

"Something pleasant, I suppose," said Mrs. Oakes, smiling.

"Pleasant! oh! it's perfectly splendid!" Laura went on, dancing around the room, excitedly. "You know he promised us a treat if we ranked first; and to-day he told us — and it's just too nice for anything! You could n't guess in a week!"

"Then I won't waste any time in the attempt," replied Mrs. Oakes; "but if you could manage to calm down a little, I have news for you, too."

"Oh, your news is nothing to mine, I know,"

said Laura earnestly; "but I'll tell you," and she sat down in front of her mother, and went on slowly, to give due weight to her communication. "He's going to take the whole class to the Falls for three — whole — days! Think of that!" and she jumped up again, and rattled away so fast that her mother could n't get in a word.

"Is n't it splendid? What grand times we 'll have! Just we six, and Miss Holmes to take care of us! Going out in two carriages — start to-morrow morning — take lunch in the woods — picnic, you know (Mr. Sabin knows a lovely place) — get there before night, and stay all the next day. I'm so glad! I have n't seen the Falls this year, and did n't stay half long enough when I did see them. Oh, dear! I never heard anything so splendid!" and she fairly had to stop for breath.

"Laura," began Mrs. Oakes, but Laura interrupted —

"We have n't a thing to do; Mr. Sabin has ordered the lunch (at Brown's, Clara White says). We 've only to be dressed and

have our things for over night in small satchels at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. I'll wear my new poplin, shan't I, mother? Ain't I glad it's done? Just in time; oh! if it had been last week!"

"Laura," Mrs. Oakes began, more decidedly; "you haven't heard my news; and I'm afraid you will think it's bad news, now."

"Oh, Mother!" said Laura piteously, "don't tell me any bad news now; wait till I come back from the Falls."

"I can't wait, dear," said Mrs. Oakes; "for then it would be too late. I'm sorry to tell you now — but I must."

"Well, what is it, then?" said Laura, sitting down again.

"I had a letter to-day from your Uncle Will — your father's brother, you know — who has been in Europe ever since you were a baby. It seems he returned at the beginning of the war, and has been in the army all through. And now he is coming here to see us, and will bring your Cousin Lily, who was born abroad, but is nearly of your age."

"Well, what of it?" asked Laura, rather impatiently; "she 'll be a stuck-up city girl, I suppose, but she won't stay long — thank goodness!"

"But that 's not all," said Mrs. Oakes, hesitating; "they come to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Laura exclaimed; "so much the better; then I shan't see them!"

"But, Laura," said Mrs. Oakes, "you can't think of being so rude as to leave home, when they are coming on purpose to see you."

"I don't think it's rude," said Laura hotly; "I 've been engaged to this thing ever so long. I think it would be ruder to refuse Mr. Sabin's invitation."

"My dear, you want so much to go that you can't see the right of it; and I 'm very sorry for your disappointment — but I think you will have to give it up."

"Oh, Mother!" wailed Laura; "the first treat I 've had in years! It 's too bad!"

She threw herself on the lounge, and — though she was eleven years old — sounds suspiciously like sobs came from that corner.

Mrs. Oakes tried to say something comforting, but in a minute Laura burst out angrily, —

"I just think it's real mean, so there! I never can go anywhere like other girls, or have things! I always wear faded-out old duds, and stay in this poky old hole from one year's end to the other! And now, when I've got a decent dress, for a wonder, and a chance to go somewhere like other girls, these hateful, stuck-up city folks have to come and spoil that!"

Her head went down again with a bang, and the sobs were more decided than ever. That speech does n't look very well when it 's all printed out, does it? Well, it did n't sound very well either, and Mrs. Oakes spoke more severely :

"Laura, I'm ashamed of such an exhibition of temper! Don't let me hear another such speech from your lips!"

When her usually gentle mother spoke in that tone, Laura knew there was nothing more to be said. So, after sobbing awhile,

she got up, bathed her red eyes, and went over to her "best friend" — Mamy Hargin — to tell her the dreadful news.

It was a great disappointment, and she passed the night very miserably; and the next day it was worse, when the whole troop stopped at the door for her, and she had to tell them she could n't go, and the girls were all so sorry; and Mr. Sabin said if he had known it he would have deferred it a day; and Mamy Hargin kissed her good-by, and they all drove away.

The world looked very dark to Laura as she turned into the house to help her mother prepare for the hateful visitors. Mrs. Oakes kept no servants. Her income was just large enough to enable them to live comfortably, with few luxuries. So Laura, with a very cross face, I 'm sorry to say, put on a big apron and prepared to wash the breakfast dishes, while Mrs. Oakes swept and dusted and put the little cottage in order.

Mr. Oakes had written that the steamer on which he had taken passage would stop an

hour or two at the pier near the village to take on wood, and he should merely drive up and call on them.

About three o'clock a carriage came up to the door, and Laura, who stood at the chamber window, with her new poplin dress on, saw a tall gentleman — a little lame, and wearing an officer's coat — and a girl about her own age get out and come up to the door. She heard her mother let them in, heard Uncle Will's pleasant, hearty voice, and still she stood there, half resolved to run out the back door, and not see them after all.

But her mother called her, and very sulkily she went down. Uncle Will kissed her, and his voice grew husky as he said how much she looked like poor Hal — her father. And Lily sprang to meet her, — a fair, slight girl, with blue eyes, and a cloud of golden hair. And Laura loved them in a minute, and forgot her disappointment.

As for Lily, she was an only child, and had no mother, and she had come prepared to love Laura like a sister. When they started on

their journey — around the great lakes — for the benefit of her health, she had suggested the plan of taking Laura with them. And Mr. Oakes, knowing it was lonely for her to live with him alone, and feeling tenderly towards his only brother's child, was very willing to gratify it. Besides, she was so gentle and lovely that it was impossible to refuse her anything she wanted. So now nothing remained but to get Mrs. Oakes's consent, and take her along.

The sudden proposition to join them on their trip took away Laura's breath. She could say nothing; she only looked at them as though she doubted her own senses. But Lily laughed, and told her to run and throw her things into a trunk, for they should be gone three or four weeks.

Laura turned in a bewildered sort of way to her mother; but Mrs. Oakes, not being so overcome, gave consent at once, only hesitating about her wardrobe.

"Oh, that is nothing," Lily said; "the dress she has on is lovely for traveling; and

the first city we come to we can get anything she needs, all made."

Mr. Oakes put in a few words, and nothing remained but to get ready. Mrs. Oakes's traveling trunk — relic of brighter days — was hastily emptied, and packed with Laura's things, and in another hour the neighbors saw with amazement the trunk thrown up to the driver's seat, and Laura drive off with the travelers.

Mrs. Oakes went down to the pier to see them start, and in a short time the Morning Star steamed away; but as long as it was in sight Laura and Lily waved their handkerchiefs to her from the guards.

"Oh!" said Mamy Hargin, the evening of her return, when she ran over to see Laura, and was met by the astounding news, "was n't Laura glad she did n't go off to the Falls? What a splendid time she 'll have!"

It would be pleasant to go with the gay party around the delightful lakes, stopping as long as they pleased in every attractive place on the shores, and making little excursions

into the country; but I must hurry on to the day when the steamer brought them back to the pier, and when, after stopping at every corner to talk to some of the girls, the two cousins at last reached the house, full of a "perfectly splendid" plan that they and Uncle Will had arranged on the journey, and impatient to unfold it to Mrs. Oakes for her approval.

"Oh, Mother!" began Laura, the moment she saw her, "I've had such a nice time! I can't tell you in a week how much I've enjoyed it!"

"And, Auntie," Lily broke in, eagerly, "Papa's going to buy a house in New York, and settle down, and you and Laura are to come and live with us — always, you know — and Laura's to go to my school, only we'll be day-scholars, and we're both to begin music, and — oh! she's going to be my sister!"

Mrs. Oakes turned to Lily's papa, who stood smiling at the eagerness of his daughter, and he said:

"Yes, Mary, that is the castle we three wise heads have built on the boat, where we had

plenty of time, you know. But, seriously, Lily and I have both set our hearts on it; I won't speak for Laura," glancing at her eager face, which spoke for itself. "You know I could n't keep house without you to matronize my two girls and keep us all straight. Besides, I could n't feel happy not to do for Hal's daughter the same I do for my own. And as to separating these two from each other, or either of them from me, it is n't to be thought of."

And after more talk, thus it was decided. Mr. Oakes went to New York to make arrangements, while Lily remained "to hurry them up," she said. They did not need any hurrying, for Laura was nearly wild, and gave her mother no rest till the house and furniture were sold, and their clothes packed to go.

"Mother," she said, in one of the last days, when they were busy packing trunks, and Lily had gone out, "how mean I did act about staying home from the Falls! If you had let me go, as I wanted to, just think! I should have missed seeing Lily, lost my nice trip,

and never gone to New York to live with her! Is n't it nice to have uncles and cousins?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Oakes, smiling; "disappointments are good for us sometimes; and to find out the truth of that is a valuable lesson."

"Well, that was very nice, after all," exclaimed Kristy. "I 'm so glad it turned out so beautifully. It 's lovely to have stories end nicely."

"So it is," said gray-haired Aunt Mary, lying back in her big chair, for dear Aunt Mary was an invalid, though no one would know it to hear her talk; "but I can tell you a story that is n't ended yet — it is still going on."

"Like the famous 'Story without an End?'" asked Miss Kate.

"No," said Aunt Mary, smiling, "not like that. I mean the influence of it is still alive and working in the world. I shall call my story 'Aunt Sue's Secret.'"

CHAPTER VIII

AUNT SUE'S SECRET

MADGE had been crying; it was easy to see that. Even now the tears hung on her lashes, and she leaned back in her chair looking very pale and tired.

"But I don't think you ought to give up so," said Aunt Sue, folding up her knitting.

"I 'd like to know how I can help it," said Madge fretfully; "tied to this old chair, with nothing on earth I can do."

"There are plenty of things you can do, dear," said Aunt Sue gently, putting on her bonnet.

"Tell me a few," Madge began sharply; but at that instant she sprang forward, and her whole manner changed. "There 's that little imp again," she cried. "Hear her, Aunt Sue; I believe she 'll torment me to death!"

As she spoke there came in at the window

the loud, rattling sound made by drawing a stick quickly across a picket fence.

"She does that forty times a day," went on Madge, the angry color rising in her face, "and she takes pains to get muddy sticks. Mamma says the outside of the fence is dreadfully marked up."

"Have you asked her not to do it?" said Aunt Sue.

"Asked her!" scornfully; "she'd do it all the more. I wish I had a brother, or a dog," she added savagely. "Why, she's the terror of the neighborhood! she not only spoils the fences, and makes that horrid noise, but last week she flung a dreadful old cat into Mrs. Townsend's garden."

"Was she seen doing that?" asked Aunt Sue, drawing on her gloves.

"No; but everybody knows she did it; she's always doing such things. She's perfectly wild. Look at her. There she comes."

At that moment, indeed, there came in sight a queer-looking girl of ten or eleven, barefooted, with a tattered calico frock, and

a tangled shock of rough black hair. She stopped, and looked between the pickets with her sharp black eyes.

"She always stares at the flowers," said Madge, "and she steals all that she can reach through the fence. Look at the lily-of-the-valley bed!"

Sure enough; as far as the little arm could reach, not a flower was left.

"She seems to be fond of flowers, poor child!" said Aunt Sue pityingly.

"Poor child!" echoed Madge; "you 'd better say bad child."

"Madge, dear," said Aunt Sue, turning from the window and looking at her niece, now lying back exhausted in her invalid-chair; "you said you could do nothing; now here 's a job all ready to your hand. It 'll take tact, you have plenty; it 'll take time, you have that to give; and it 'll take patience, and that, my dear, will be good for you to cultivate."

"What is the job?" asked Madge, leaning forward eagerly.

"To tame that girl," said Aunt Sue firmly.

Madge fell back, disgusted.

"Tame that hateful thing!" she cried petulantly. "I'd like to see you try it!"

"It can be done, dear; I have a secret for taming the wildest human being that lives."

"What is it?" asked Madge languidly. "Not that I think anything would tame that creature."

Aunt Sue leaned over and whispered two words into Madge's ear. She started up, colored, and cried quickly, "Oh, I could n't possibly do that!"

"I don't suppose any one ever tried that with her," went on Aunt Sue, preparing to go.

"I daresay not; I don't see how they could," said Madge. "Must you go?"

"Yes," said her aunt; "I'll just step out and say good-by to your mother. Good-by, dear," kissing her niece. "I shall not see you again till I get back from Vermont."

"Good-by, Auntie; I wonder if I shall ever go to Vermont — or anywhere," she murmured, as her aunt passed out of the room.

"Humph!" she went on, talking to herself as she often did since the long illness that had left her unable to take a step, with little hope that she ever would. "That receipt of Aunt Sue's might work with some people, but not with that wild thing. I wonder what sort of a place she lives in. It must be horrid! Ugh! Nothing but a beast could live so," she went on.

"But perhaps she can't help herself," suggested something within her.

"I would help myself," began Madge; and then she suddenly remembered how unable she was to help herself out of her chair, and the color flashed into her face once more.

She did not like to think about her wild neighbor, so she took up a book. She could not read. She could not get that troublesome girl out of her mind, and Aunt Sue's whispered charm rang through her head like a peal of bells.

"Well," she said that night, after she had tossed and tumbled and tried in vain to go to sleep, "it won't do any harm to try it anyway, though I know it 'll fail."

The next morning was mild and pleasant, and Madge's chair was drawn up by an open window overlooking the picket fence, the playground of her tormentor. Before her on the sill stood a pot holding a beautiful plant in full bloom.

"She 's fond of flowers," thought Madge; "I 'll begin with them."

About the usual time she heard the old pattering footsteps; the old clatter on the fence began, and then suddenly stopped. She glanced up from her book. There stood the unattractive girl, staring open-mouthed at the flowers. The stick had dropped to her side; for a moment she forgot her mischief.

Madge seized that chance. Hastily breaking off a sprig with two or three blossoms, she tossed it out toward the girl, saying, "Do you want a flower?"

For an instant the child was struck dumb, then she snatched the branch from the ground as though she had stolen it, uttered a savage whoop, and ran off as if she expected to be followed.

Madge sighed. "Tame her!" she thought; "Aunt Sue did n't know her!"

However, she found that she felt a good deal better herself for that little advance, even though it had been met in such a way. Toward night, as she still sat there, she chanced to look up from her book, and — wonder of wonders — there was the wild girl actually walking quietly past the fence, no stick in her hand, and looking up at the window. This time Madge tossed out a sprig of rose-geranium, and said quietly, "If you put it in a pot it 'll grow."

"Hain't got no pot!" shouted the child of the street, snatching as before the gift, and running quickly out of sight.

The next week there came a day warm enough for Madge to be wheeled out in her chair to the piazza, and left with her books and a vase of cut flowers that some friend had sent her.

When the girl came in sight, she was at first alarmed to see Madge outside, and started to run, but Madge smiled and tossed her a

lovely rose. She hesitated, picked it up, and Madge said:

"I wish I could run like you!"

"Why don't yer, then?" shouted the vagrant, who seemed unable to speak quietly.

"Because I can't even walk," said Madge sadly.

"Can't yer?" said the child, drawing nearer. "Bet yer foolin'!"

"Indeed I'm not!" said Madge eagerly. "See my wheel-chair? I have to be wheeled everywhere."

"Hain't yer got no legs?" she asked, interested.

"Yes, I've got them, but they are n't any use," said Madge. "What 's your name, little girl?"

"Mag," said the child, drawing back a little.

"Why, Margaret 's my name, too, only they call me Madge. What 's your other name? Mine 's Maynard."

"Hain't got none!"

"What 's your mother's name?"

"Hain't got no mother!" and for the first time the defiant tone was gone. She spoke almost gently.

"Poor Maggie!" said Madge. "May I call you Maggie? Whom do you live with?"

"Old Ann," said the girl; "she lets me sleep along o' the baby, 'n I gits my own grub."

"Grub?" repeated Madge inquiringly.

"To eat, yer know," said the child, with a short laugh. "Don't yer know that?"

"We don't call it so," said Madge. "Where do you get it?"

"Oh, I gets it round back doors," said Maggie, with a cunning look. "Some o' the cooks is good to me."

"Well, I'm going to have my lunch — or grub, as you call it — out here to-day," said Madge, "and if you'll go home and wash your face and hands, you may come and have some too."

Maggie was evidently struck with the proposal, but afraid to accept.

"No, yer don't!" she said defiantly. "Yer can't catch me!"

"I don't want to catch you, Maggie," said Madge. "How could I, when I can't walk? But you need n't come up here; I 'll hand you something over the railing."

"Bet yer won't!" said the child rudely. "Yer jist wants ter catch me and make me go ter school like 'n ugly old man did oncet. But I got away, I did," and she chuckled slyly, "'n' I scratched his face fer him," she added, with a laugh. "Bet he won't come after me ag'in!"

Madge was shocked. Was this the child she was to tame? The task seemed hopeless.

When she looked up — after a moment — Maggie was gone.

But she did not forget her invitation to lunch. It was no doubt the first she had received, and too tempting to be declined. When the little table with its tray of good things was set down by her side, and Madge began to eat, she was startled by a rough voice very near, and almost behind her.

"Thought yer said ye 'd gi' me some!"

Madge turned quickly; there sat the impish creature, perched on the railing close by.

"So I will," she said, holding out to her the plate of thin slices of buttered bread.

Maggie's eyes opened wide; she snatched the whole, and began eating as though she were starved, biting through the whole at once.

Madge winced, but reflected in an instant that the child knew no better; she had not been taught table-manners. She went on eating herself, and keeping watch of her uncouth guest, for she looked as if she might pounce upon the table and carry it off.

Just as the last mouthful was crammed in, Madge laid a large piece of cake on the empty bread-plate and offered that to the child, who seized it in the same rude way, as if she expected it to be jerked away from her.

Thus, one after another, disappeared three slices of cake, three or four fresh doughnuts, half a dozen cookies, two bananas, and a glass of milk. Then, seeing nothing left but empty dishes, the girl slipped down from her perch and was gone.

Mrs. Maynard's look of amazement when

she saw the empty tray drew from Madge the heartiest laugh she had uttered since her illness, and she explained that she had entertained a very hungry guest.

I have not time to tell you how Madge went on step by step, winning Maggie's heart, and teaching her by example, and a quiet word now and then, civilized ways of talking and eating; nor how she persuaded her to wear decent clothes which her mother looked up out of her outgrown stock; nor how she interested her, first in growing plants and flowers, then in pictures and books, till she grew eager to learn to read. Maggie was a bright child, and as soon as her confidence was won she was very ready to be taught. Madge found, to her own surprise, that never had she passed so happy or so busy a summer; and, stranger still, that she had come to love her "little imp" as she had never loved one of her playmates.

Six months after her talk with Aunt Sue when winter began, Maggie was her constant companion. She came every day for her lessons, she was learning to sew, and she could

not do enough for her dear friend, thus greatly relieving Mrs. Maynard.

Madge, too, was no longer the fretful, delicate invalid in whose ear Aunt Sue had whispered her magic secret. Magic, indeed, it had proved. Not only had the wild child become tame, but Madge herself, though she could not walk, was well and rosy, and even happy. With a pair of tireless hands and feet at her service, she almost forgot her own helplessness, and books, and fancy work, and plain sewing with Maggie almost made the days fly.

For several weeks Madge had been trying to think of some way of taking Maggie into the family. The difficulty was the expense of supplying her vigorous appetite. For a month or two she had been earning her own breakfast and dinner by work she could do for a prosperous Irish family in the neighborhood, where she could have a little bed of her own. Madge always gave her luncheon.

One night, just as Maggie started for home, it began to snow. She hurried along to get her dinner and do some work before she went

to bed. The night was cold, and the wind and the snow had the town to themselves. The wind roared and howled around the houses, swooped down the chimneys, whistled through the cracks, rattled the blinds, and shook the gates; the snow made no noise, but it was busy for all that, though not a soul in the village suspected the tricks it was playing. When people began to look out of doors and windows in the morning, they hardly knew where they were. The village was half snowed in. The streets were filled with huge drifts that reached from house to house and covered the fences all out of sight. Against the south and west sides of every house the snow was heaped as high as the second story, and trees were bowed and breaking under their load. Many people whose bedrooms were west did not get up till very late, for no light came in to tell them it was day.

When Maggie looked out and saw the buried village, she thought at once of Madge and her mother alone, with no one to shovel snow for them, and she resolved to do it herself as

soon as she had breakfasted. But when she looked over to the cottage and saw that it was buried nearly out of sight, and no smoke coming out of the chimney, she was frightened about her friend. She forgot her breakfast and hurried out at once.

After floundering through and creeping over the huge drifts in the way, when she came near the house she was horrified to find that every door and window was buried, all being on the south and west sides. The only opening uncovered was the attic window in the peak of the low roof. The drifts reached quite up to this, but could she climb the soft snow?

The thought of calling on any one for help never occurred to this child of the streets, for she had all her life relied upon herself; besides, every man in town was busy digging out his own house. She bravely went at it, and after much labor and many falls into snow over her head, Maggie managed, by lying at full length on the soft drift, and slowly crawling forward, to reach the attic window in a

half-frozen condition. Grasping the sill with one stiff hand, she pushed up the sash with the other, and with great difficulty pulled herself up and crept in.

When inside she sank to the floor exhausted and numb with cold, but the thought of Madge roused her; she shook herself out, and carefully picked her way downstairs. All was perfectly still and dark, and she grew more and more alarmed as she came near Madge's door. Here she knocked.

"Oh, come in!" cried a sobbing voice, "whoever you are."

Maggie opened the door and spoke, and was answered by Madge's voice.

"Oh, is it you, Maggie, you blessed creature? I thought I should die here alone. Mamma has been gone so long, and I'm half-frozen; and what makes it so dark when the clock has struck eight?"

"You're snowed in," said Maggie, proceeding to light a candle. "I'll see about your mother."

First, however, she snatched the blankets

off Mrs. Maynard's bed in the next room, and piled them on to Madge, then started for the kitchen.

On opening the door of that room, the cold air struck her like a blow, and there on the floor, half-covered with snow that had knocked her down when she opened the door, lay Mrs. Maynard, still — perhaps dead.

Maggie smothered a shriek, not to frighten Madge, and hurried to her. She was not dead, but she was entirely unconscious, and cold as ice. Seizing a broom, Maggie swept aside the snow, and shut the door; then, finding the fire laid, she lighted it, and hurried back to Madge, for she did not know what to do.

Though she told her only that her mother had fainted, Madge was terribly scared. She begged Maggie to drag her mother in there, where she could help get her into the warm bed.

The rooms being on the same floor, Maggie did manage to drag Mrs. Maynard into the room, and by the help of Madge get her on to the bed beside her. Then they covered her up

warmly, and Maggie got camphor and whatever restoratives Madge could think of, and they rubbed her hands and feet, and at last she came to consciousness. By that time, too, Maggie had a brisk fire going in the stove.

It was two or three days before Mrs. Maynard recovered enough to go about, and during all that time nobody came near them, and Maggie did everything that was done. Every one was fully occupied in clearing his own premises, and attending to his own needs. Fortunately, they had food in the house, for until the snow melted or settled a little, no one could go out, much less be sure of getting back.

On the third day Maggie, from an open window, attracted the attention of some neighbors, and explained their situation. Then they were dug out, and life began again.

But neither Mrs. Maynard nor Madge would hear of Maggie's leaving them again. They knew she had saved the mother's life, and probably the daughter's as well.

"Oh, Aunt Sue!" said Madge, when on

that lady's return she told her this story, "if it had n't been for your 'charm,' I should never have tried to tame her, and both mamma and I would have died during that terrible time. But I did n't believe in it at all when you told me. Who would think that just to 'love her,' as you said, could work such a change? And she 's the dearest girl. I could n't help it now if I tried."

"She is n't the only one who is changed, Madge, dear," said Aunt Sue.

As Aunt Mary paused, Kristy whispered to her neighbor on the lounge, "Aunt Sue is just herself, I know. She 's always doing such things." "Aunty," she began aloud, "did you say that story was still going on?"

"Yes," said her aunt, handing her package to Cousin Harry to lay on the table, "Madge and Maggie are both alive and useful, good women."

"Talking of stories without an end," said little Mrs. Carnes, "let me tell you one, not

like yours, Aunt Mary," turning fondly toward the gentle aunt whom everybody loved, "but — well, you shall hear 'Hope Minton's Secret.'"

CHAPTER IX

HOPE MINTON'S SECRET

"I 'll never try that again — never ! " cried Hope Minton passionately, flinging across the room a package she held in her hand, and throwing herself across the bed, with a violent burst of tears.

The package, hitting roughly against a chair, burst open and scattered a shower of finely written pages over the floor, but Hope paid no attention to that. She was suffering the most bitter disappointment of her life.

After some time she sat up, with face flushed and wet, and hair disheveled.

"I 'll never write another word," she cried passionately. "I 've always been praised for my compositions, and I 've read so many stories of wonderful success by girls no older than I, and I don't believe there 's a word of truth in them, for the moment I try to write

for a magazine or paper, nobody wants anything I can do. I've tried stories and essays and sketches and everything else, and all alike are returned with thanks, though I know they're better than half the things I read in the papers. I'll never try it again — so there!" and with this rash resolve on her lips she rose, collected the scattered pages and thrust them in a heap under the grate fire which was burning in her room.

"There!" she said, as the last page smouldered away to a heap of crackling ashes, "that ends the work of weeks, and I'll never try to do anything but have a good time."

Hope thought the disappointment of her literary ambition was the very worst thing that could happen, and, feeling that the world could hold no greater sorrow for her, she slowly brushed her hair, bathed her eyes, and at last went down to the dinner-table, for though tragedy was in her heart, and her life was a failure, she would not have any one suspect it for the world.

But the day was not over, and it was a day

of importance in her life. At the dinner-table her father sadly announced that his business affairs had come to a climax, and that he had placed his property in the hands of a friend for the benefit of his creditors, and had determined to go to the West and begin again.

A thunderbolt would not have startled Hope more than this. Her literary failure at once seemed a small matter. To leave their beautiful home, their dear friends, to live in a dreadful "Western village," to be poor — this was terrible indeed.

But terrible as it was, it had to be done, and a month later saw them moved. Dismal enough was the one small hotel of the village where the Minton family had to spend the winter, and every one of them was miserably homesick, though Hope thought her sufferings the greatest. "Mamma has us all to look after," she wrote to one of her friends; "the younger children go to a little school even Brother Paul has found a congenial friend; only I am utterly alone, and entirely wretched in this dreadful place."

Brother Paul was a few years older than Hope, and I 'm sorry to say did not think very highly of his ambitious sister. He had not outgrown the boyish way of despising what is not like himself — girls, for instance. He had not lived long enough to find out that a world full of boys and men would be a stupid place, and that just because girls *are* girls, and are not boys, it is a very delightful old world, in spite of the way things get twisted up sometimes.

Hope was proud, and of course very shy of this scoffing brother. She would die before she would have shown him her literary efforts; and that his sister ever touched a pen except to fill a copy-book, or write a French exercise, had never entered his head.

He had found a friend — as Hope said — in the person of the editor of a weekly paper, which dragged out a wretched existence in the village. In his office, or shop, or sanctum, whichever it might be called (it was all three), Paul spent most of his time; and to amuse himself, and because he was fond of the work,

— having once owned and edited an amateur paper, — he soon took to helping his friend, both in writing and in printing, for this unfortunate editor was proof-reader and printer as well.

Things were in this state when Mr. Minton was suddenly taken very ill and died, of nothing more nor less than a broken heart, for he had been greatly misled and disappointed in moving to the place. When his body was laid in the desolate graveyard, there arose before the bereaved family the grim question of how they were to live after the small sum of money now in hand should be exhausted. Many and serious talks the mother had with her son, Paul, on whom she naturally leaned in this distress.

Hope, too, was filled with eager desire to do something to help. Oh, if she had only been more attentive to her books at school, she thought, she might now be able to teach, and if she could write — but with that thought came a pang of grief, though, because it was the dearest wish of her heart, it would always come up.

"All the chances come to Paul," was her bitter thought, one day, when he told his mother that his friend the editor was obliged to go to a warmer climate, on account of his health, and offered to sell the paper to him at so low a price that he could really make a little money out of it if he kept it running till the end of the year.

"But you can't run it," said his mother.

"I think I can," said Paul. "I have learned about the mechanical work, that I did n't know before, and by the help of the scissors I shall have little writing to do. It is only the advertisements that must be kept up."

Hope sat by a window reading, and her eyes sparkled as she thought how she should love to edit a paper, and of her many and long contributions to the school paper at home; but she kept her face down, and said nothing, of course.

After some talk it was decided to buy the paper, and the next week Paul entered upon his duties.

Now came hard work for the young man. All day he spent in the office, setting type, arranging matter, reading proof, and so forth, and in the evenings he tried to write the little that must be fresh, even in a far Western newspaper. It soon got to be almost impossible even to keep his eyes open, after a day in the office, not to think of writing an editorial.

"I am sure I could do *something* to help," said Hope to herself as the weeks went by, and she saw Paul growing thin and careworn. "But I 'll never offer. He 'd turn up his nose at the idea;" and this thought shut her mouth tighter than ever.

But her chance came. One evening she was sent by her mother to her brother's room for some purpose, and opening the door quietly, not to disturb him, she went in. There on the table lay Paul's work spread out, and there — alas! lay Paul's head on his arms, fast asleep.

Hope drew cautiously near. Three or four magazines lay in a pile, and he had begun

writing notices of them. The first one lay open before him; he had evidently been looking it over to find something to say about it. At the top of a page of manuscript paper was written:

"The ——, as is its custom, comes first to hand of all the monthly magazines. This number is of unusual interest, containing a large installment of Mrs. ——'s continued story, which is — "

Here the pen had dropped from the tired fingers. A thought struck Hope. She had read every word in those magazines, and she always had something to say about them. Without stopping to think twice — on a sudden impulse — she snatched the pen, dropped into a chair, and took up the broken end of the sentence. That finished, another suggested itself, and still another, and, in a word, before she rose, she had written a notice of each magazine on the table, and had filled several pages of manuscript.

Then a panic seized her, lest her brother should awake and catch her, and hastily drop-

ping the pen, she slipped out of the room, closed the door quietly after her, and hurried to her own room, where she scrambled into bed as though she had committed a crime.

"What *will* Paul say!" loomed in terror before her mind.

Two or three hours later Paul awoke. The fire had gone out, and the room was cold, while the lamp burned dimly.

"Confound it!" he muttered, looking at his watch, "one o'clock, and no writing done! How stupid to go to sleep so! Now I 'll have to write in the cold, for I must have those notices the first thing in the morning."

When he had brightened his lamp, he turned to his work, and then he stared and rubbed his eyes, seized and eagerly read the completed notices.

"Why! — why! — what does this mean? Could I have done this in my sleep? But no, it isn't my writing. Anyway, it 's very well done, and I am heartily thankful to the good fairy — whoever it is — who has saved me all that work;" and he prepared to go to bed,

saying, as he arranged his papers for the morning, "I suppose some one in the house happened to look in and saw me stuck, and took pity on a fellow."

"There's one thing," he added, as he blew out his light, "I am glad I know there is some one who *can* do it. I'll find him out and press him into the service."

And so he flattered himself, but he found that not so easy to do, for when, the next morning at the breakfast-table, he told the story of his good fairy, no one responded. Every one seemed interested, and asked questions, but no one confessed, and no one even looked guilty. He never thought of turning his eyes to that corner of the table where Hope hid her blushes by bending closely over her plate, and pretending to be deeply absorbed in eating her oatmeal.

The next evening he yielded more easily to sleepiness, and Hope stole quietly in, with an excuse on her lips if he were awake. He was asleep, and she left on his table a little paper she had spent the day in writing. It was only

a small thing, but it was simply and naturally told, for in attempting to disguise her authorship, she hit upon the happy device of writing in newspaper style. After some hours spent in looking over newspapers of the best standard, she had really quite caught the style. This was the touch needed to make her writing fair literary work, it was the key to success.

The new paper was welcomed as eagerly as the first had been, and the breakfast-table was quite lively with the story and efforts to discover the author.

From this time Hope worked early and late. She studied her subjects well, and did not fall into the pitfall which ruins so many young writers, namely, to give her own crude opinions, for which, of course, the world cares nothing. She gave facts, and gave them in a bright, fresh way.

Now Hope's days were happy, and homesickness fled far away. She even dared no longer leave her manuscript in her brother's room, for the mystery had become so interest-

ing, that everybody in the house was wide-awake to find out. She sometimes pushed them under his door, sometimes — if she could trump up an errand — she left them in his office; sometimes she thrust them under the office door, and once she dropped one through a broken window; two or three she sent through the post-office, and one she slipped into the pocket of Paul's overcoat that hung in the hall.

The mystery grew, and Paul began to be really anxious to know who was his secret helper. Thanks to this good friend he had hardly a word to write for the paper, and he wanted to express his gratitude, and to know one that he felt would be so congenial in these wilds.

One evening he went to his mother's room.

"Mother," he said, "my mysterious friend has sent me a little story, and it is really a touching thing. I think it is very good, and I tell you we have a genius hidden in this town. I wish we could discover him. Let me read this to you."

He seated himself near her, to get the light from her lamp; thus, for the first time, Mrs. Minton's eyes fell on the manuscript. She started.

"Paul, let me see that!"

Her tone surprised him.

"Why, Mother! what is it?" as he handed the manuscript to her.

She looked closely at the handwriting.

"Do you know the writing?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," she said shortly.

"Whose is it?" he demanded.

"It is — Hope's."

"Hope's!" in tones of indescribable scorn. "You must be mistaken!"

But the mother took from her table a receipt-book, in which Hope had often copied items for her. She opened it at one of these pages, and laid the book beside the manuscript, saying quietly:

"You may compare for yourself, my son. You have never done justice to Hope. Dear child, how well she has kept her secret," she

murmured to herself, as Paul bent over the handwriting, determined to find differences, but finding only perfect resemblance.

"I suppose I must admit that they are extraordinarily alike," he said at last, "but I never should have suspected her," he added slowly, trying to adjust his former ideas of his unknown helper to this strange fact.

"And you 're not half pleased to find it out now," said his mother.

"I 'm too surprised at present," he said evasively; but he did not read the story aloud, and soon went to his room.

The next morning he said nothing, but took to watching Hope in a quiet way. He saw how bright and happy she looked, how absorbed in something; not in the least like a lonely, homesick girl, away from all her friends and associates.

"She 's growing very pretty," was his mental comment, "and, come to look at her, she has a very intelligent face, and I guess she is the guilty one."

During one of these sharp looks, Hope

chanced to meet his eye, and she was instantly struck with the change.

"He knows!" was her thought. "He never looked at me like that! — I 'm sure he knows," and the color rushed to her face as though she were a thief. "I 'll never dare to send him another," was her next thought. "He 'd return it, I know."

So no more papers found their mysterious way into his hands, but the congenial work could not be given up, and a flight began, through the mail, to the newspapers of neighboring towns, which exchanged with Paul's paper; and then one — more ambitious — traveled to the East, and was accepted — happy day!

Meanwhile Paul sadly missed his helper. Once more he had to return to his pen, and found it harder than ever. His respect for Hope grew fast, his treatment of her was quite changed.

"He makes me feel like a young lady," Hope said to herself, with a laugh; "he 's so desperately polite."

At last came a day that to Hope was the happiest she had ever known. The morning mail brought her a crisp ten-dollar bill for a story, and at noon Paul stopped her in the hall, and said gravely:

"Sis, I wish you 'd write me a little paper this week — I miss my mysterious helper awfully."

"Why, Paul!" Hope stammered.

"I know you can," Paul went on, smiling in a knowing way, "and it 'll help me ever so much if you will."

"I will," said Hope, with happy tears in her eyes, for though nothing on earth would have made Paul admit it, his manner had said as plainly as words, "I know I have been mean to you, and have never appreciated you, but now you have compelled my respect."

From that day Hope took her place by his side, and together they carried the paper to its end. When it was comfortably out of the way, and Paul had collected the dues, and found himself with money enough to go East and seek employment, he armed himself with

a file of the deceased paper, and visited editors' offices till he secured for Hope a situation on a newspaper, with a fair salary to begin with, and bright hopes of future advancement, which nothing but her year's hard work in just that line could have fitted her to take.

A year from the date of Hope's despair — which began my story — found the whole family back in their own city, supported in comfort, if not in the luxury of the old days, by Paul and Hope, who worked their way in the world side by side, and helping each other, as brother and sister should.

But although the rest of the Minton family unite heartily in abuse of that far-off Western village, where the most terrible year of their lives was passed, Hope will never say a word against it.

"For it was there," she affirms warmly, "that I learned, in bitterness and by hard work, the cause of my failure, and the road to success."

"I know who Hope is," said Kristy, as

Mrs. Carnes came up to lay her gift on the table.

"I guess not, Kristy," said Mrs. Carnes, with a smile and a faint blush.

"Yes, I do!" repeated Kristy; "it's yourself."

"Well; whatever you know — or think you do," whispered Mrs. Carnes, "don't tell!"

"I won't," answered Kristy, kissing her friend. "It's a lovely story."

"Shall I tell you a story of another Hope?" asked Aunt Lill. "This one was almost as discouraged as the one we have been hearing about."

"I hope she came out as well," said Kristy.

"You'll see," said Aunt Lill. "I shall call my story 'Hope's Christmas Tree.'"

CHAPTER X

HOPE'S CHRISTMAS TREE

"WHAT is it, Hope?"

"Oh, nothing much," said a fretful voice from the bed; "only I'm so tired. I've embroidered, and crocheted, and painted, and read, till I'm just sick of everything; and my bones ache, and I don't believe I'll ever get well." And the head went down among the pillows, and the pale face was buried out of sight.

"My dear," said her mother gently, "I know it is very tedious to lie on a hard bed for months, especially for one so active as you. But the doctor says you are improving, and you must n't get discouraged."

"I'd like to know how I can help it," sobbed Hope, turning a tear-covered face to her mother, "when I've been stuck to this horrid old bed for three months, with my knee

strapped to boards, and when I've made every fancy thing I could think of, and read every interesting book in the library, and got so awful tired of everything! And now it's most Christmas, and all the girls are having such splendid times going to parties and getting ready for the Christmas Festival, and I have to stay poked up here in bed."

"I saw some girls yesterday," said Mrs. Laurie, hoping to divert Hope's attention from her own griefs, "that I don't think are having any gayer times than you."

"I should like to know where?" asked Hope indifferently.

"At the orphan asylum," Mrs. Laurie replied, "where I went to a meeting of the Board, you know. Poor things! they have little to look forward to — a few years' shelter of the asylum, and then bound out to work somewhere. And most of them are as bright and interesting as children who have parents to make life happy for them."

"How many are there?" asked Hope, somewhat interested.

"Only twenty-five now," said Mrs. Laurie; "and it's very fortunate there are no more; for it's such hard times just now that it is all the Board can do to feed and warm them. I really don't see how we can make a Christmas festival for them as we have heretofore, unless we get help outside. It's a pity, too, poor things!"

At this moment Mrs. Laurie was called out of the room and Hope was left alone. Perhaps some blessed angel stood by her bed; at any rate she could not get those wretched orphans out of her thoughts. She pictured their life in the great barn-like asylum. She thought of the dreary round of lessons, with no mother to go to at night, and no home in all the wide world. She imagined their dismal holidays with nothing to look forward to, and nothing to talk about.

Bedtime came. She was undressed and lay down to sleep, the shaded night-lamp placed in the corner, the glass of water, and a little bell, to ring if she wanted anything, put on the table at her side, and the family went to bed.

But something was the matter with Hope. Wide awake she lay, staring up at the wall, not crying now, but with an earnest and thoughtful face — more thoughtful than sixteen-year-old faces usually are. By and by a bright color came into her pale cheeks, her face grew eager and happy, and not till toward morning did she fall asleep.

"Why, how bright you look!" was her mother's morning greeting. "Do you feel better?"

"Oh yes, Mother!" exclaimed Hope; "and I 've thought of something! I 've got a plan!"

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Laurie, glad to see her interested in something at last.

"I 'll tell you all about it pretty soon," said Hope; "only first I want you to tell me something. Will you?"

"Yes, if I can," said Mrs. Laurie, smiling at her eagerness.

"Well, how much do you expect to spend for me at Christmas?" asked Hope.

"Dear me! I don't know," said her

mother; "I usually look about till I find something you would like, and then buy it."

"Yes; but there 's some limit," said Hope earnestly; "you would n't think of spending a thousand dollars!"

"Of course not," laughed Mrs. Laurie; "especially this winter. Well, at a rough guess, I should say not much over fifty dollars this year."

"Oh, that 'll do nicely!" exclaimed Hope. "And now, Mother, I 'll tell you my plan. In the first place, I want you to give me the money itself, and before Christmas, too; and with it I want to get up a Christmas party for those forlorn orphans. I want a tree, — a real nice one, — and I can make lots of things, dolls, and everything; and I want a nice supper, and — "

"But, my dear child!" interrupted Mrs. Laurie, "fifty dollars won't go far towards supper and presents for twenty-five children!"

"I know it will not be very grand, Mother," said Hope earnestly; "but it 'll be grand to them — poor things! And, you know, the

presents won't cost much: I can make such lots of things, and I 've got plenty of time; and Aunt Jane 'll help you about the supper, and Phil will get the tree and fix it. I 've thought it all out, and I know I can do it; do let me, Mother!"

Mrs. Laurie thought it was a great undertaking, and she disliked to have Hope try to do it; but when she looked into her eager, glowing face, — brighter and happier than since her injury, — she had not the heart to refuse; so, after a few moments' hesitation, she said:

"Well, dear, if the doctor thinks so much excitement good for you, I won't object. But you 'll find it hard to do without presents yourself, I 'm afraid."

"Oh, I shall enjoy getting it ready better than the presents, I know," said Hope eagerly; "and thank you, Mother; the trouble of it will all be yours, after all."

"Indeed it will not!" said Mrs. Laurie; "you 'll have to do every bit of your own planning, and make all your own presents;

I 'll only have to wait on you, and obey orders, and everybody knows that is n't very hard."

"Well," said Hope, laughing, "the first order I give is that after breakfast you send Phil to me — I 've got to have his help — while you go up to the asylum and get a list of the children, names and ages, and if there 's anything special they like, such as dolls, or books, or candies, you know."

"Well, I 'll do that," said Mrs. Laurie, who began to take an interest in the plan herself.

After breakfast Hope sat up in bed and was dressed, as usual, in a soft, quilted scarlet sack. Her night-things were taken away, the bed made up fresh, the pillows piled up behind her, and she was ready for company. Mrs. Laurie started for the asylum, and Hope proceeded to try and interest Phil in her plan. Phil was her brother, and one year older than herself, and it was through his carelessness that she had fallen and hurt her knee. Feeling responsible, therefore, and suffering pangs

of self-reproach, he had been her most devoted servant since that day; and when the new plan was unfolded to him, he entered into it with zeal.

"Not that I care a fig for the little beggars," he said carelessly; "but if you 've set your heart on it, Sis, I 'm bound to help you through."

"I have set my heart on it," said Hope; "and I want you to make everything you can think of that 's nice for boys — it 's hardest to make things for them — carts, and tops, and whips, and jumping-jacks. Oh, is n't it nice you can whittle so beautifully, and I can paint them, you know. Dear! how we shall muss up mother's nice bedroom!" and she fairly laughed in glee.

The doctor just coming in heard that laugh, and at once decided that getting up a Christmas tree was the very best medicine she could take.

Mrs. Laurie handed over the money and the list of names, and business began that very day, with the purchase of dolls, gilt and

silver paper, glue, and so forth, and the searching of the piece-trunk for bits of silk and ribbon. Hope was busy and eager from morning to night, and Phil spent every evening at her side, whittling and hammering and sawing and glueing, and gradually getting together a goodly array of strong, practical toys. At every odd moment Hope puzzled over her list of names, and wrote after each the special present designed for it. And rapidly the holidays drew near; the large trunk placed at the side of Hope's bed was about full of completed presents, and Phil was looking out for a tree.

Word of what was going on had somehow got out, and by the efforts of a few sympathetic ladies every child at the asylum was provided with dress suitable to the occasion, collected from the outgrown garments of the children of the village. Not only Aunt Jane, but other friends, came in to help about the supper; and when the night arrived, Mr. Brown, the livery-stable man, offered to send his long sleigh up to bring the whole troop down.

It was really a beautiful entertainment that awaited them. A very pretty tree, loaded with nicely dressed dolls; cradles made of cigar-box wood, furnished with comfortable bedding; sets of doll's furniture, made of pasteboard; dogs of rough gray flannel; tops; jumping-jacks; elephants of gray Canton flannel; rabbits and ducks of white Canton flannel; soft yarn balls, covered with crochet-work; sets of grace-hoops and sticks, to play in the long halls; small wagons, with button-moulds for wheels; trains of cars made of blocks; and dozens of other things; and for each child a cornucopia of candies, and a fancy box of nuts and raisins.

The supper — already spread out in the dining-room — was nice enough for anybody, Hope said, and provided with special reference to young tastes. Plenty of tarts, and cakes, and fruit, and ice-cream, with milk to drink; and seats, that they might eat at their ease; and last of all, an orange and package of goodies for each to take home.

The party was a grand success. The chil-

dren — most of whom had never seen anything so beautiful — were in raptures, and Hope, lying on the sofa looking at them, was almost too happy to speak.

During all these weeks her knee had been getting well, and the doctor had reserved for her Christmas present the news that she might begin to use it, and not lie another day on the bed. And though no presents were received by the family, — for Mrs. Laurie and Phil insisted on contributing theirs to the general entertainment, — they all agreed, when it was over and the children had gone home, that they had never spent so delightful a Christmas Eve.

"After all these strenuous stories," said Miss Kate, "I 'm afraid mine will seem frivolous, but a change is good for us; and it is n't well for us to be serious all the time. I will tell you about a dinner that ran away, and I ought to know it, for I was in it."

CHAPTER XI

A DINNER THAT RAN AWAY

THE way it began, Hannah was cross that day. For one thing, she had a big Thanksgiving baking to do in an old-fashioned house, where pies and cakes were made by the quantity.

Then, while she was out of the kitchen a moment, Margery, in a frolic with puss, had upset the churn with its load of cream all over the snow-white floor.

That made plenty of extra work; but the crowning disaster was to find, when she went to the pantry for the beans she intended to bake, that a bottle of brandy that she had kept last summer to bathe her ankle, which she had sprained in falling down the cellar-stairs, had been upset.

It stood far out of the way on the top shelf, but, unfortunately, the dish of beans was directly under it, and the brandy had dripped

over them, soaking them so thoroughly that it was not possible to use them.

But the worst was yet to come. On finding the beans ruined, she simply emptied them into the pail which stood at the kitchen door, and, washing her hands, set to work to knead her big pan of puffy bread-dough.

Now the kitchen door opened into a woodshed, and the ash-pail, with the beans on top, was supposed to be safe enough; but, unfortunately, on this special afternoon, the outside door was ajar.

The beans had not been there long before the turkeys came around to be fed, as usual; and one of them, of a prying disposition, noticed the open door, and probably remembering the good things that came out of the door, quietly hopped on to the step and walked in.

Nothing to be seen but piles of wood for the season, now getting severe, and — yes — a pail with something in it.

"Ah! that looks good; I'll try it," thought the curious turkey (no doubt).

She did try it, and not being sensitive in

either taste or smell, she never stopped trying it until she had swallowed all the top beans, soaked in brandy, and then turned to go.

The effect was sad.

Her head whirled around, it is supposed; at any rate, her legs refused to hold her up, and she fell to the ground — insensible.

Half an hour later, Hannah went out for more wood to replenish her fire, and in the gathering darkness, stumbled over the turkey, still lying there.

A glance at the fowl, to see that she was not outwardly hurt, and another at the pail, told the shameful story.

"Here 's a fine bit o' work!" exclaimed Hannah, turning the limp turkey over. "The idiot has gone and killed herself entirely with those beans! I 'd like to know who left open that door! Well, well, I want a turkey for Thanksgiving, and this one died by accident, and its meat will be as good as though I 'd wrung her neck."

So muttering and grumbling to herself, after fixing her fire, she attacked the turkey,

for, though she was sometimes cross, she was always economical, and she knew no questions would be asked as to how it came to its end, provided it was fat and was roasted well.

In a few minutes, she had the feathers off, except those on the wings and the tail, and she laid the picked turkey on a bench to cool, shutting the door to keep out the cat while she finished some other work.

Meantime, tea-time arrived; the family came home, and were all at the table, when the door burst open and Hannah rushed in, evidently frightened out of her wits.

"O Mr. Winslow," she cried, "there 's something in the woodshed! — all in white! and it ran after me when I went for some wood, and I dare n't go out there, if you plaze!"

Mr. Winslow, supposing some animal had got in, left the table, and, arming himself with the poker as he passed through the kitchen, threw open the door.

Silence and darkness only.

Yet in a moment came an audible rustling

on the woodpile, and an indistinct glimpse of something white.

"Bring the light, Hannah!" called Mr. Winslow; and taking a candle from her trembling hand, he led the way to the strange object.

"It's a white — why, no, it isn't!" he interrupted himself, as he drew nearer to the fluttering, frightened thing. "It's — I declare, it's a picked turkey! Where on earth —"

"A picked turkey!" screamed Hannah. "Sure, and can it be the one I picked myself this evening has come to life?"

"How did you kill it?" asked Mr. Winslow.

"I didn't kill it at all. The botherin' crater killed itself ating beans that got soaked in my brandy, and I had to stop my work and dress it before it cooled."

"Well, it evidently was not dead," said Mr. Winslow; "but now it's dressed, you'd better cut off its head."

"Oh no, Papa!" cried Margery, who stood

on the steps. "Don't kill the poor thing! I'll take care of it somehow."

"But it'll freeze, dear," said Papa, going back into the kitchen.

"No, I'll fix it up; I'll make it something to wear. Please let me!" pleaded Margery earnestly.

"Well, I don't care, child," said her father, laughing. "Do as you like, and dress it up. I want a fat gobbler, and not a five-pound hen-turkey for Thanksgiving."

After some trouble, the shivering, naked turkey was caught and carried into the warm kitchen. It was carefully wrapped in an old skirt for the night, and tied into a basket.

The astonished creature rebelled, and fought against the indignity of wearing a flannel skirt; but cold conquered it, and at last it cuddled down quietly in its strange new bed.

Through the long Sunday that followed, the turkey was kept a close prisoner; and by the next morning, many plans had been thought out for its comfort.

That was a great day to Margery, who was confined to the house by delicate lungs, and who longed for something to pass away the hours when lessons were over, and the daily sewing "stint" finished.

Here was something to do! The new pet was fed, and the lessons and sewing hurried through, so that by noon she was free to carry out her plans.

By this time, the turkey had found out that Margery would n't hurt it, and was not so frightened as it had been the night before; so when the little girl took it in her arms, it made little objection.

"Now you must have a name," said Margery, softly, carrying her new plaything off into her own especial corner of the big kitchen, where work and Hannah never came. "Let me see," she went on, "I 'll name you after my lovely doll that got broken — Kristine — and I must make you some clothes, so you can walk around, and not be hobbled up so."

With the help of Mamma, the busy little

girl contrived a sort of coat for Kristine. It was made of an old shawl, and was bright scarlet, with black and white plaid.

It came pretty well up on the neck, and of course covered the naked legs; the wings were left inside. It was fastened together at the breast, and was really a pretty good fit — considering.

As ornament, Margery sewed some of the fringe of the shawl around the neck, like a ruff, at the edges where the wings ought to be, and around the legs. So, when dressed, the unfortunate, or rather the naughty turkey, looked like a new plaid variety of the scarlet flamingo, with side-pockets and fringed drawers.

The appearance of Kristine stalking around in her new suit was very funny. How the boys did laugh! and even Papa had to wipe away the laughing tears.

In this dress, the next morning, after she had been fed daintily, Margery introduced her to her old friends of the poultry-yard by opening the kitchen door and letting her walk out

where the turkeys were taking their breakfast.

Margery thought they would be glad to see her, but alas! this distinguished stranger in gay attire was not recognized. They stared and scolded at her, and the old gobbler ruffled up his feathers, and dragged his wings on the ground, and came up to her, saying, angrily, —

"Gobble-gobble-gobble!"

Kristine seemed to be disheartened at this coolness on the part of her family, and slunk into a corner, as though ashamed of her fine dress. Then the family crowded around her to punish her impertinence in coming among them, and actually began to peck at her.

Margery, who was watching from the window, could hardly believe her eyes at first; but, yes, they were actually pecking at the poor outcast, who finally fled screaming across the yard. Margery flew to the door, and Kristine hurried in, just in time to escape the whole family, who were close upon her.

"You poor dear Kristine!" she murmured

over her when she had her safely in arms. "Did they peck you? — the naughty things! You shan't go with them any more! You shall stay with me in the house."

So it came to be at last. Hannah grumbled a little, but after all, she could n't say much, for it was by her own fault that the poor thing lost its own winter coat. Before long, the family grew quite attached to Margery's pet, whose name they shortened to Kris.

On her part, Kris was a very bright bird. She would come when called by name, and she never failed to be on hand at meal-times, when she would walk around the table and receive delicate bits from every one.

While her little mistress was studying or sewing, Kris would stand and look at her, turning her knowing head first one side and then the other, and sometimes saying in a reflective way — "Quit!"

As soon as books and work were put away, she was ready for play. In fact, she enjoyed her strange life very much, and grew fat under it, so that pretty soon the boys began to tease

Margery by suggesting that her pet was ready to take her place on the table.

The only time she seemed to be uncomfortable was when the cheerful kitchen was scrubbed. No sooner did Hannah appear on the scene with scrubbing-brush, and go down on her knees to polish the floor, than Kris would hop, by a sort of ladder which one of the boys had made for her, up to a corner of the high mantel over the fireplace, and there she would sit, all humped and miserable, till her mistress came and took her into the sitting-room.

The place where Kris was expected to spend the time of her banishment from the yard was a large chamber over the woodshed, which was kept warm by the kitchen chimney, and there is where her bed or roost was prepared for her and where she was shut up every night, but she was so lonely and unhappy, and tried so hard to get out, and Margery was so fond of her for a playmate, that she generally got down before breakfast and did not go back until bedtime.

Well, winter passed away and spring came. Kris grew a new set of feathers under her plaid dress and when the weather became warm, Mamma said she must leave off her dress and go out of doors with the rest. So the first really warm day Margery took off her red dress and drove her out.

Kris had not forgotten her cool reception in the winter. So she was at first careful not to go too near the turkeys, though they did not object to her now in her feather dress. After a few days she stayed most of the time with them, only coming when called and generally making a visit to the table for her usual treats.

She had not been out very long, when one morning, when Margery went out to see her, she was gone. No one had seen her since breakfast. Margery felt very badly, and after looking all about came to the sad conclusion that she had strayed away and got lost. But the next morning at breakfast-time Kris walked in as usual, and began to beg for food. Margery hugged her and fed her, and she ate as if she were starved.

This now became the regular thing with Kris. Every morning she was on hand for her breakfast, and in spite of watching she would slip away and hide, so that no one could find her again.

Poor Margery was almost heart-broken at this tendency to vagrancy in her pet, but Hannah only smiled and said, —

"Wait a bit and you'll see something nice."

Though Hannah had her suspicions, she was not prepared for what really happened one day. Margery was in the woodshed when she heard a step that she knew, and Kris hopped down on to the top step of the stairs which led to the room overhead. In a moment, she hopped to the next, and after her came, one by one, twelve baby turkeys.

Margery screamed with delight, and ran to catch Kris and pet the whole family, while Hannah rushed upstairs in dismay, and saw a sight that shocked her more than the fear of tramps.

In that room trunks, and things not in use, were stored, and a month or so ago Hannah

had carried up there a large "squaw basket" with a cover, a basket such as the Oneida Indians make. This cover Kris had managed to get off, and there on Hannah's best finery, she had made a bed for her babies.

I will not tell you of the scene that followed. Kris and her family were banished to the yard, except at feeding-time, when they were allowed for a time to come in to be fed.

At first it was funny to see twelve baby turkeys running around to pick up crumbs, but as they grew, it began to be troublesome to have a flock of turkeys so much at home in the house. So Mamma made a new law that Kristine and her family must not be fed at the door.

After that her life was like that of the other turkeys, only she knew her name and would come when called, and never failed to run up to Margery whenever she saw her.

"I wish I had seen that turkey; — how funny she must have looked! Were you Margery?"

"Yes," answered Miss Kate, placing her package on the table.

"It is curious to see" — began Aunt Lu — "how much stranger is truth than fiction. The story I shall tell is one of those strange ones that it is hard to believe are true, yet it really happened just as I shall tell it. I knew the heroine after she grew up. Now, listen."

CHAPTER XII

MARIE'S MISSION

"I'll have to go out and seek my fortune," said Marie solemnly.

"The Blessed Virgin hear the child!" said Biddy, pausing with the flatiron in air; "what put such-like a thought into your little head?"

"Oh, they always do in the stories, you know — when folks don't want 'em," answered Marie, her large blue eyes opening wider and wider as the thought grew.

"You must n't be thinking such stuff," said Biddy, observing the eager look of the child. "Mis' Gilmer, she 's just took up with company an' such, — and she ain't used to children, you know — you must n't mind that."

"But she hates me," said the child sadly; and the suspicious moisture in her eyes gathered into large drops and rolled slowly down her thin, wan cheeks.

"Oh, no; she don't do that," said Biddy kindly, bringing her iron down savagely on the shirt-bosom before her. "She 'll get to like you better if you 're a good little girl, and don't bother."

"I never do bother," said the little philosopher of six. "Mamma —" but at the sound of the beloved and heart-breaking name, her self-control vanished. Yet even then she did not behave like other children, and burst into loud wails. She laid her head on the edge of the ironing-table and covered her eyes with two little thin hands.

"Oh, don't cry now, Miss Mary," said Biddy coaxingly; "come, I 'll bake you a little cake next time I bakes, in a little round tin, all for your very own."

But even the charms of that picture could not console the queer little weeper. A low wail came from the table, "I don't want any cake, Biddy; I just want a mamma."

"Bless the child!" said Biddy, quietly wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron. "You know, dear, your mamma is happier, —

leastways I hope so — may the Saints forgive me," added Biddy under her breath, rather shocked at her own liberality.

"Yes, I know, — but she would n't be if she knew," sobbed the muffled voice.

"Oh, come now," said Biddy, hanging the ironed garment on the clothes-horse and depositing her iron on the stove; "I would n't think about that now. You know Mis' Gilmer is out, and you 'n' me 'll have tea here in the kitchen, real cozy — what shall I make for you? — would you like a tart, now?"

"No, I don't want a tart, — I don't want but one thing," and Marie, having stopped crying, lifted her head again; "but I 'll have to do it, Biddy," she added, after a moment.

"Have to do what?" asked the kind-hearted Irish girl, startled by the look of purpose on her face.

"What I said — go and seek my fortune," repeated Marie.

"Nonsense!" said Biddy, "where 'll you go?"

"Oh, off in the street, somewhere," said Marie anxiously.

"But the policemen 'd send you home again," said Biddy.

"I would n't tell them," said Marie quickly.

"Bless the child," said Biddy under her breath, "what a wise little head she has, now!"

"And 'sides," she went on pathetically, with a suspicious sob in her voice, "I have n't any home — this is n't home."

"Oh yes, it is!" said Biddy; "Mr. Gilmer is your uncle, you know, 'n' of course his wife is your aunt — an' now your ma has gone to Heaven — you 're going to live here."

This picture did not comfort; and in fact the child was so dismal and unhappy that the puzzled servant thought the best thing was to put her to bed, so that in sleep she might forget. It was not quite dark, but the child was perfectly willing, and so it happened that in about ten minutes she was tucked into her little bed, and Biddy went back downstairs muttering to herself all the way.

"It 's a shame," she said, with face burning, — "it 's a shame and so it is, to treat the poor child so, for she 's as nice a little one as

I ever see — barrin' that she 's so queer 'n' old-fashioned. I don't see why Missis does n' take to her," and she returned to her ironing, sure that a good sleep would make the child forget.

But sleep did not come to the orphan Marie, who, her aunt had declared, must be called Mary — for she would n't have any stuck-up French names around her. It was too early, and besides a burning thought had taken hold of her. In the story-books her nurse had read to her, the unhappy ones always went off to seek their fortune, and they always had such funny things happen to them.

The more she thought of it, the more excited she became, till at last she got out of bed, saying, "I might go now; everybody is away but Biddy;" and she started down the stairs. But instinctively she knew that Biddy would prevent her, so she turned back. Just then she remembered to have seen Biddy open the door on to the roof, and like a flash came the thought, "I might go out that way — no one would find me up there, and no big policeman could bring me back."

Without a second thought she ran softly upstairs in her little bare feet, quickly climbed the step-ladder and squeezed out through the half-open door to the roof.

It was not quite dark — as I said — and the roof seemed a new world to the queer little white-gowned figure. It was flat, covered with gravel, and it extended nearly a whole block, over the long row of houses, in one of which her uncle lived.

She went to the back and looked over into the fearful chasm of the back yards. She started back alarmed, and ran far off, with the vague idea of finding some corner to hide in. She found no corner, but, away off at the farther end, she found something else that attracted her — another open scuttle-door.

She looked down, she hesitated, but at last, with the thought "Perhaps somebody good lives here," she put one little white foot on the steep steps, and in a moment found herself at the foot.

With a quickly beating heart, but without hesitation now, she went on to find somebody.

The evening was not cool and doors were all open. Before each one the little white figure paused, knocked gently, and then, receiving no reply, looked in. One after another she tried — empty, every one on that floor. She ran down the next flight, and began with the doors there. Two rooms she found empty, but at the door of the third she paused.

It was, to be sure, empty like the rest, but something in the look of it struck her. The bedstead, with its white lace curtains, was small, hardly bigger than a crib. The bureau, all painted blue, — with ribbons and pretty things on it, — was small, too. The chairs were a size to match, and the carpet had little blue flowers on it. Everything was little and dainty and sweet.

"It must be it 's my room!" said the child in unquestioning faith. "Maybe I've found my fortune." Without a thought of impropriety she went in. Her fine sense of the beautiful was satisfied. She looked at everything with ever-growing delight. The thought that it was for her had taken entire posses-

sion of her. She had been carefully taught that our Heavenly Father gives us what we need. No little unloved orphan ever more needed a home and love than she, and that she had found it now, the innocent child-heart never doubted.

After a long enjoyment of the room and all its pretty belongings, evidently for a small girl, she remembered that she had not found any one. So, with "I guess I'll go and find the Mamma," she started down the next flight of stairs. Again the first and second rooms were empty, and receiving no answer to her gentle tap at the third door, which was ajar, she pushed it open and stepped in. The room was almost dark, and for a moment she did not see any one; then she noticed, lying on a lounge, with eyes closed as if she were asleep, a lady.

Softly she drew near, her bare feet making no noise on the carpet. The lady was dressed in black, and her face was thin and white, and heavy sighs came every few minutes from her lips.

Marie looked sharply at her. "She looks as if she would cry," was her criticism, but she had not the hard look of Mrs. Gilmer. She liked her, and was sorry for her.

Something — her sharp look, perhaps — made the eyes suddenly open. A startled, almost a terrified look came over her face, but Marie said softly, —

"Are you the Mamma?"

The lady sprang up with a cry that was almost a shriek. "Where did you come from? Who are you?"

"I 'm Marie," said the sweet young voice. "I 've come to be your little girl."

"My God!" cried the lady. "Am I going mad! Alice! Alice!" she cried wildly. "Have you come back to me? Oh, if I am mad!" she moaned, covering her face with her hands.

But Marie drew nearer, and in a moment the touch of a little hand on hers startled the lady again. She screamed again, "Child! Are you a child, then? Are you alive and not a dream? Where did you come from?"

"From up there," said the child, indicating with her pointed finger the upper story.

"Who sent you to me?" cried the excited lady.

"I guess God sent me," said the little one, remembering some of her Sunday School training.

But now the lady roused herself completely. She seized the child and drew her to her. The clear blue eyes looked innocently and fearlessly into hers. The long, half-curling hair that her aunt had ordered braided, had got loose and hung over her shoulders. Her fluttering white gown and her bare little feet made her look not unlike a visitor from another sphere, and such for a moment Mrs. Bartlett had thought her, startled as she had been from thoughts of her own lost child, of whom she thought night and day, and for whom she mourned and would not be comforted.

But now she was thoroughly aroused. She questioned the child, but Biddy's threat of the policeman had sunk deep into her heart,

and the strongest thought she had was that she must not tell where she came from. So, except by a vague pointing up to indicate the roof and so not tell a wrong story, no hint would she give.

"But how strange it is!" said Mrs. Bartlett, when all she could get out of her was "I've come to live with you."

"How strange it is! Do you know, Little One," — her sore heart yearning for sympathy even from a child, — "do you know that my own little girl, about as big as you, has gone away and left me desolate?"

"Where's she gone?" asked Marie softly, stroking tenderly the warm hand that rested on the sofa.

"Oh, she's gone to Heaven," moaned Mrs. Bartlett; "God took her."

"Isn't God very bad, then?" asked Marie.

"Oh no!" cried Mrs. Bartlett, shocked, "of course not."

"But He took my mamma, too," wailed Marie. "Why does He take everybody and make us feel so bad?"

"Oh, it's to do us good, I suppose," said Mrs. Bartlett, driven to assert her principles before this young heathen.

"Did it do you good?" asked Marie anxiously.

"Oh, I'm afraid it has n't," burst out the lady; and then with an irresistible yearning she snatched Marie in her arms, pressed her to her heart, and kissed her again and again.

"You darling! you darling!" she sobbed, "you shall stay with me — I will be your Mamma."

"Yes," assented Marie with a child's faith, "and I'll sleep in my little blue room upstairs."

"What do you mean?" gasped Mrs. Bartlett, much startled, for no one but herself was ever allowed to go into the room, kept exactly as if her child were expected back every moment. "What do you know about a blue room?"

"Oh, I went in as I came by," said Marie, "and I saw all the pretty things — the blue ribbons and the picture — carrying the lamb, you know — and — "

"My God! how strange this is!" said Mrs. Bartlett. "I must inquire;" and she touched the bell beside her. "Bessie," she said to her maid who entered, "where did this child come from?"

But Bessie was so startled by the sight of a child in her mistress's arms that she plainly could not speak.

"Can't you speak?" said her mistress sternly. "I find a child in my room — and I want to know how she came there. I don't suppose she dropped down from the skies."

"'Deed, then, Mrs. Bartlett," said the girl with a gasp, "I never set eyes on her before — 'n' I 'm certain she did n't come in the door."

"Go and ask Jane," said Mrs. Bartlett.

Investigation was made. Each servant was sent for and questioned, but all were confounded to see the child, and not one had the smallest idea where she had come from. The surprise, indeed, put it entirely out of Bessie's mind that she had gone up and closed the scuttle-door, which had been open for ventila-

tion, even if that had occurred to her as a possible solution — which it did not.

In the other house, too, — Mrs. Gilmer's, — the scuttle had been closed without thought, hours before she was missed. Indeed, she was not missed till eight o'clock in the morning when Biddy went in to dress her, and when she was not found, the only thought was that she had slipped out the front door; and then, when Mr. Gilmer — who, though not very affectionate, yet had a sense of his duty — questioned all the servants very closely, Biddy told what the child had said about seeking her fortune, and not a doubt remained that she had carried out her plan and run away.

So Police Headquarters was visited, and Marie was sought high and low, all over the city, though very quietly, for fear of unpleasant gossip, at the very moment when she was resting on the bosom of her new-found Mamma, happy to the bottom of her heart. And not a whisper of the loss in their own block came to the ears of the Bartlett household.

Mrs. Gilmer was shocked at first, but having found the sad-faced child a real burden, she was soon consoled, and when Mr. Gilmer had done what he could through the police, all came to the conclusion that the police theory was right — she had really run away out of the city, and all search died out, and Marie was completely lost and mourned by no one but faithful Biddy.

But oh, how happy the child! — and how happy her adopted Mamma! From that first hour when the searching question of the child had shown her the wickedness of her unreasoning grief, she had begun to throw it off, and the sweetness of Marie had completed the cure. She took the child into her heart, and she was from that moment a changed woman, with a feeling akin to superstition about the entirely unaccountable way in which Marie had got into the house. Without hesitation she installed her in the room of the dead darling, dressed her in the dainty garments, and could not bear her out of her sight.

The change in the house was so delightful

to the servants that one and all looked on Marie not only with pleasure, but with a bit of awe besides, which her quaint, old-fashioned ways and sayings fostered.

In the sunshine of love and tender care her very nature seemed to change, and she became a gay, laughing child, the light of the household and almost, if not quite, as dear to the heart of the mother, whose salvation she had been, as her own Alice had been.

As she grew, teachers were procured for her, and every advantage was given to her, but one thing she never forgot — the danger of being carried back by a policeman. For years she would never walk past her uncle's house; and not until she was old enough to be sure no one would recognize her did she get over her terror about being carried back.

Many years after, when she had grown to be a beautiful young woman, and being of age could not be carried back against her will, she told her loved mother the true story of how she had gone out to seek her fortune.

Then inquiry was made about the family of

her uncle, and it was found that the uncle was dead and the aunt was now an invalid, and so cross and disagreeable that she could hardly keep a servant, except old Biddy, who still lived with her.

One day the bell rang, and Biddy, who happened to be the only servant in the house, opened the door. There stood a beautiful young lady.

"Biddy," she said, "don't you know me? I 'm Marie! and how is my aunt?"

Biddy gasped.

"Don't you remember," went on Marie, smiling, "I told you I was going out to seek my fortune and I did — and found it — that very night."

Then Biddy burst out. She laughed and cried, and in fact made so much noise that Mrs. Gilmer rang her bell to know what was the matter.

When she was told she was hardly less surprised, and a good deal more chagrined than Biddy; and when she learned that she had lived all these years in the same block, and

when she saw what a charming young woman she was, and reflected on her own forlorn and deserted state, — left to servants, — she coveted her, and calmly made the demand that Mrs. Bartlett should give her up.

Mrs. Bartlett not only declined, but so — emphatically — did Marie, although from that time she made it one of her daily duties to spend an hour with her aunt, reading to her or trying to cheer her up.

As for Biddy, she simply adored her, and on the death of Mrs. Gilmer and the breaking up of the household, she begged Mrs. Bartlett to take her, and she became the maid of the little girl who had gone over the roofs to seek her fortune.

"Kristy," said Aunt Lu, hesitating, and holding her package tied with blue ribbons in her hand, "I don't believe I 'd better add another to this pile of stories; you 'll never have time to read them."

"Oh, indeed I shall!" cried Kristy eagerly; "and even if I never read them, I want to

have them — to remember. They 'll fill a whole shelf in my bookcase at home and I 'll fix them some nice way — let me see — " and she fell into a brown study, till aroused by Uncle Will, who had just come in.

" Telling stories, eh ? This little niece of mine is the most story-mad of any person I know, and I came in especially to tell a story of a certain boy I knew a good many years ago. You see," — turning to the audience, — " he and his sister were boarding with a peculiar and not very agreeable lady in the village, while their father and mother were away, and this is the story of a slight accident that happened."

And seating himself on a low stool before Kristy, he began.

CHAPTER XIII

ROB'S ACCIDENT

"NAN!" shouted Rob, meeting her on the street as she was slowly walking toward Mrs. Pratt's where she and her brother were boarding a few weeks while their parents were away on a journey; "there 's a party at our house!"

"I guess not! Mrs. Pratt have a party! I think I see her!" said Nannie incredulously.

"But there is!" went on Rob eagerly; "I saw 'em! — the parlor is full, and the windows are open, and the front hall is full of ladies."

"Oh, yes!" said Nannie, "come to think, it 's the Sewing Society. I forgot it was going to meet there to-day."

"And there 's lots of goodies for tea," Rob went on, in a lower tone, dancing along by the side of his sister, too much excited to walk. "I peeped into the pantry and saw

Augusta setting the table in the dining-room, and there 's raisin cake, 'n' plum preserve, 'n' cookies, 'n' biscuits, 'n' cold tongue; ain't it jolly?"

"Of course Mrs. Pratt would have a nice tea for the Sewing Society," said Nannie.

"I wonder if we can go to the first table," said Rob anxiously, just remembering that there were a great many people to take tea.

"Of course not," said Nannie's friend Mary, in a superior way; "we always have to wait when Ma has the Society. There 's never room. But we don't care, we can do as we 're a mind to, and most always have as much cake as we want — if there 's enough left."

"I can always have as much cake as I want at home," said Nannie, with dignity.

Mary looked in surprise at the girl who could have all the cake she wanted.

"Well, I can't, then!" cried Rob. "I *never* had enough cake. I hope Mrs. Pratt made a stack this time."

"You may be sure she did n't," said Nannie, "and she 'll not be too busy to put away

every bit, except two small pieces for us. I should n't wonder if she gave us our supper on the kitchen-table, either — she 'll be afraid we 'll muss her nice tablecloth — see if she don't ! "

I must tell you that to be a " boarder," free from the restraints of home, had been Nannie's own wish. She thought she should be perfectly happy, if she could do exactly as she liked in everything. Her mother had consented to the plan, because she thought Nannie would learn the value of home and a mother, and as it happened had placed her in the family of Mrs. Pratt, a well-meaning woman, and honest in intention to do her duty, but of narrow ideas, and living in much plainer style than Nannie and Rob were accustomed to. To them Mrs. Pratt's ways seemed hard and cruel, but on her side I will say that to her their ways seemed extravagant and foolish, and they had been a trial to her. Both sides were heartily tired of the arrangement, and both were longing impatiently for the return of the travelers.

" Dear me ! " Nannie went on with a sigh,

"mother's only been gone three weeks — it seems as if it was a year! I never thought weeks could be so long!"

"Catch me boarding out again!" said Rob fervently.

"Or me, either!" added Nannie as warmly, as she opened the gate of Mrs. Pratt's house.

Sure enough, the windows were open, the green shades rolled up, and the room full of ladies; and still more, the front door was open, and the front hall, which Nannie could only think of as pitch dark and smelling of varnish, all light, and full of busy workers who had been crowded out of the small parlor.

Nannie was naturally shy, so she stole in quietly, and slipped around to the back door. When she entered the kitchen, she found Mrs. Pratt and Augusta hurrying about cutting cake, and dishing out sweetmeats from two big stone jars. She paused a minute, as what hungry school-girl could help, but Mrs. Pratt broke out,—

"Go 'way now, children! Don't bother!"

"Had I better — shall I put on another dress?" asked Nannie hesitatingly, not knowing how much she would be expected to mingle with the guests.

"No, I do' know 's there 's any need," said Mrs. Pratt. "You have n't any call to go into the front room, an' of course there won't be room for you at the first table."

Nannie felt a lump in her throat, and the tears came very near to her eyes. Not because she cared for the company, for she was retiring, and preferred to be in the background. But this cool way of putting her into the kitchen made her desperately homesick for a moment. She was going quietly to her room, but Rob was not so easily silenced.

"Ain't we going to have any supper?" he demanded.

"Of course," said Mrs. Pratt shortly, "but you 'll take it at the second table, where there 'll be only Augusta and Miss Willard's Jane. — What she brought her along for, *I* can't make out," she added to herself.

"Can't we have any cake and things?" Rob

went on, his boyish appetite getting the better of his indignation at being treated so. Mrs. Pratt turned and said severely, —

"If you behave yourself and keep out of the way, you will have a piece of tea-cake and a dish of sauce ; if you are a bother not a crumb will you get but bread and butter — and that's good enough for anybody," she added.

Quite quenched, Rob stole upstairs after Nannie, and they had a good homesick talk together for a little while.

But boyhood is n't easily kept down, and before long Rob was in the upper front hall, looking over the banisters at the company below, and running back to tell Nannie who was there, while Nannie, scorning to enjoy society in that underhand way, busied herself with her kitten, nursing her homesick feelings, and pouring out her woes to her sympathizing furry friend.

Sitting at the very foot of the stairs, busily stitching away at a piece of unbleached muslin, was Rob's special antipathy, Miss Jones. She was a lady of about forty years, who

wore glasses, little corkscrew curls, "skimpy" black dresses, and who "minced" as she walked. This lady had forgotten that she was ever young — if indeed she had been, which was impossible to imagine. She had a horror of children, especially boys. She was always looking out for sticky fingers and muddy shoes, and waving away every child who was unfortunate enough to approach her.

This conduct made her the object of all the boyish mischief in the village, and it was particularly unfortunate that she had seated herself in so tempting a position for annoying, for an aching desire to throw something down on her tormented Rob from the moment he discovered her. A wriggling worm now — or a spider — dropped on to her head to make her jump and scream; or a few drops of water sprinkled over her, would be such fun. But though he searched diligently, Mrs. Pratt was far too thorough with her broom to encourage the residence of any peace-loving spider under her roof; and the drop of water

— though tempting — would be sure to suggest "boys" to her suspicious mind, and that involved the danger of losing his own poor little piece of cake. So he contented himself — in a measure — by bringing the pillow from his room, and amusing himself by slapping it down on the railing around the top of the stairway to attract her attention, and show her that a boy was near.

Now, whatever was the matter that unlucky afternoon, — whether the thread which sewed that pillow was worthless, or whether the ticking had become worn, or whether he miscalculated his strength, — it happened thus: he brought down the pillow with a bang on the banister two or three times, and finding that Miss Jones was too busy talking with Mrs. Allen and sewing to hear it, he collected his energies for a final slap, intending to make a noise that she should hear, and then quietly slip back into his own room before she saw him.

But alas for Rob! The blow was too hard for the pillow — it burst, and a cloud

of feathers filled the air! There was a low exclamation of horror, a hasty scamper of feet, a rush down the back stairs, a slam of the lower door — and Rob was gone!

But how shall I paint the scene in the hall when the shower of feathers fluttered down all over the "spick and span" black dress of Miss Jones, nestling in her hair, clinging fondly to her worsted drapery, sticking tight to her sleeve. And not only that, but sailing impartially over all the ladies near, sticking with the well-known tenacity of feathers to dresses and hair, and — horror of horrors! — covering the immaculate carpet, where foot of child never came, and where broom and dustpan had things all their own way.

The bountiful contents of that pillow were not confined to the hall; the parlor came in for a share; the summer breeze scattered them freely, right and left, even through the door into the dining-room, which Mrs. Pratt opened in haste when she heard the confusion.

For confusion there was! — vast and dire,

from the jump and scream of Miss Jones (which Rob did n't see, after all, though it was ten times worse than he had thought) till every lady threw down her work, and devoted her individual energies to pulling off feathers from hair and dress. But each liberated feather cheerfully flew off in the air, and settled on some one else; so the labor was without result — except great confusion of tongues.

The noise brought Mrs. Pratt, but who shall tell her feelings? As soon as she heard from which direction the shower came, her quick thought pounced on the cause.

"That pesky boy!" was her exclamation, and she fairly bounded upstairs to seize the culprit. No culprit was there — luckily for his bones! — nothing but the collapsed pillow to tell the tale. She wildly rushed to the attic, and found Nannie alone with the kitten, and so serene and unconscious that even she could n't suspect her.

"Where 's Rob?" she shouted, in a tone that, added to her wild look, frightened

Nannie with the thought that she had gone crazy.

The kitten fell to the floor, and Nannie prepared for flight.

"Where 's Rob, I say?" repeated Mrs. Pratt threateningly.

"I — I — don't know," stammered Nannie.

"Is n't he hid here?" was the next question, emphasized by a most vigorous search under beds, behind boxes where a cat could not have crowded, out on the roof, behind pillows. It lasted but a minute, but it was exhaustive — not a mouse could have escaped that searching eye.

"What 's the matter?" gasped Nannie.

"Never you mind!" said Mrs. Pratt angrily; "just let me lay my hands on him, and I 'll teach him a thing or two!" — and she rushed downstairs again. Nannie followed her, with a vague idea of rescuing Rob from her insane clutches, for though she was frightened half out of her wits, she did not forget that she was Rob's protector while Mother was gone.

When she reached the front part of the house, now in such an unwonted bustle, she comprehended the trouble, and was not surprised at Mrs. Pratt's excitement; while she devoutly hoped that Rob would keep out of the way.

Brooms and brushes and busy fingers after a while restored a measure of order to the startled Sewing Society, and it gathered around the table to soothe its ruffled feelings with numerous cups of tea.

Till now Nannie had been glad Rob did not come back; but as night came on and tea was over, and she stole down to the cheerless "second table," a great dread came into her heart. "Has Rob run away?" was the thought that gave her anxiety. Mrs. Pratt was more quiet — tea had soothed her too — but she did not speak of Rob, and no plate was set for him.

Nannie choked down part of a biscuit, and her dish of sweetmeats, because she could not take it away; but her slice of cake she slyly slipped into her pocket with a biscuit —

for Rob, if he *did* come back; though the horror was growing on her that he had run away, and she should never see him again, and what would Mother say!

Silently she slipped away from the table and returned to her own room, where she sat by the open window with her only comfort — her kitten — and cried and talked to it, and longed for home and mother, and in fact was as miserable as a homesick girl can well be.

Hours passed away, and the company went home, and the Pratt family went to bed. Nannie could not go to bed: anxiety kept her awake. So she still sat by the window with her sound-asleep kitten in her arms, when — about ten o'clock — she heard a noise in the yard. A scramble, a climb, and something crawled from the fence on to the roof of the shed under her window. She was frightened and rose to shut the window, but a thought struck her.

"Rob, is that you?" she whispered.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Be careful and don't fall," she said has-

tily, "and come to my window; it 's easier to get in."

A moment more and he scrambled in, hatless, dusty, and altogether looking as though he had been sleeping under a hedge with the gypsies.

"Where have you been?" was Nannie's first question, when she had carefully locked the door — by putting a chair against it!

"Down back of our house," said Rob dazedly, "an' I have n't had a thing to eat — an' what did she say, Nannie?"

"Oh, she was awful!" said Nannie. "I thought she was crazy! It was good you were n't here. I believe she would have half-killed you! I never saw her so mad!"

"Well, I did n't mean to," said Rob, "but I knew she would n't believe a fellow — she never does. So I just thought I 'd scatter, and I did n't dare to come back. What did Miss Jones do?" he asked, with interest. "Did she get any on her?"

Nannie laughed faintly — the first time since the accident — at the picture she remem-

bered of Miss Jones dancing wildly around, picking off feathers with both hands.

"But it was awful, Rob! You never saw such a muss! — they went all over the parlor, and into the dining-room. Every lady in there was covered, and they had to sweep, and it was an hour before they could sit down."

"I suppose Mrs. Pratt 'll be mad enough to eat me in the morning," said Rob gloomily. "What would you do? — would you go down to the store and stay?"

"You can't," said Nannie, "but I guess she won't by morning. She didn't say anything when I went to tea. Oh! — here's a piece of cake I saved for you, and a biscuit," she went on, giving him the unusual dainties.

"Thank you," said Rob, quite humbly, "I 'm most starved, 'n' you 're real good, Nannie."

"I 'm glad it 's most time for the folks to come home," said Nannie irrelevantly, with a sigh.

"So 'm I," said Rob, with his mouth full of cake.

By morning Mrs. Pratt had time to get cool, and to reflect that after all it was no doubt an accident, and could be paid for. So when Rob timidly slunk in to breakfast, and slid into his seat, she said nothing but —

"Humph! I shall charge your mother with three pounds of live goose feathers, young man!"

Nannie breathed more freely, and consoled Rob afterwards with "Well, Mother won't make a fuss, and I don't believe feathers cost much, anyhow."

"There 's another story you used to tell about that same Nannie," said Aunt Lu, when he ended and turned to Kristy in pretended dismay that he had brought no gift.

"Oh yes," he said. "It is not long. Shall I tell it instead of adding to this pile?"

"Yes, do!" said Kristy, and he went on.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PILLOW BABY

When Nannie was about ten years old her greatest delight was to make a pillow baby. A baby that she could dress and undress, put to sleep, sit in a chair, hug and kiss, and correct if necessary, without danger of spoiling finery, or breaking heads, was the only satisfactory doll.

So she used to take a small pillow from the trundle-bed where her two young brothers slept, at the foot of Mother's bed, roll it up lengthwise — like a log — and hold it in that shape with pins. This made a bundle about the size of a big baby, and on this she could put real baby clothes out of brother's drawer, long white skirts that pinned on the back, and dresses which drew up to the proper size with dozens of tiny braids. With a pencil she would make the features of her pale-faced

baby, and one of brother's muslin caps — which all babies wore then — crowned the head and defined the neck. This was a dolly worth having, and many an hour Nannie and her Cousin Molly spent with a pair of these pillow babies, playing "mother" and "keep house."

Nannie's house was in the edge of the city of S——, in New York State, and the nearest house was quite a little distance away. The place was very pleasant, with a large yard and garden, and plenty of flowers and fruit.

One day there happened to be no one in the house but Nannie and Molly and Aunt Mary — Molly's mother. Nannie's father and mother had gone out to ride, taking the two boys, the two servant girls had leave of absence, and O'Hanlin had gone down to the spring for water at the lower end of the lot.

Nannie and Molly were having a grand and exciting play with two pillow babies, in the sitting-room, and Aunt Mary was sewing by the window, when, chancing to look out, she

saw a great crowd of men running up the street. She made an exclamation of surprise, and the two girls ran to the window. They saw a crowd of about a hundred men, hatless and coatless, running as if for dear life, shouting, yelling, and brandishing clubs. While they looked, terror-stricken, the foremost ones, of whom there were three a few steps ahead of the others, came opposite the big carriage gate, which stood open, and — oh, horror! — they turned in. The rest followed, and in less time than I am telling you, the whole crowd were running as one man for the house.

Aunt Mary's face turned white in a moment, and the two children seized her skirts for protection.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Nannie.

"It's a mob!" came gasping from Aunt Mary's white lips. "It's because your father is an abolitionist!"

You must know that in those remote days a person holding unpopular political sentiments was sometimes treated to a little visit from a few hundred of his excited neighbors,

which was certainly a curious way to induce him to change his opinions.

However, nothing doubting that this one dread of her life had come, Aunt Mary took a hand of each child and ran down the back stairs into the basement, undecided what to do, the two girls still hugging their pillow babies. In a moment the door above burst open and the men rushed in. They heard the tramping feet, the chairs fall, the tables smashed against the walls, the doors slammed and the windows flung open. The whole house seemed to be full of frantic, rough men.

Panic seized them again, and they rushed out, Molly still holding her precious baby, but in the fright Nannie dropping hers in the kitchen. Down toward the spring they ran, screaming, "O'Hanlin! O'Hanlin!" — but no O'Hanlin appeared. It is supposed that that cool-headed Irishman, seeing so many of his countrymen on the war-path, prudently kept his precious head off the scene, and abandoned the family to their fate.

They were soon overtaken in their flight by a fair-speaking young workman.

"Don't be alarmed, Ma'am," he began. "You won't be hurt! It's only three blackguards we're after, who've hid themselves in your house. If you'll give me permission, I'll put them out, Ma'am."

Since the house was already full of them, permission seemed rather superfluous. However, Aunt Mary, much relieved, gave the permission, and straightway the few who had remained outside joined the mob inside. In a few minutes the three unfortunates were found, under beds and in closets, upstairs, dragged down and carried off by their excited pursuers, and the blarneying leader again approached Aunt Mary, who stood pale but firm, a child in each hand.

"I hope you were not frightened, Ma'am," he said, insinuatingly, to deprecate her anger, for he was afraid of the law. "You see these three men have been stirring up trouble these many days, and at last our boys got roused, and went for them."

"Where did your men come from?" asked Aunt Mary.

"From Harrison's Salt Works," replied the man. "But the three rowdies came from Ward's, and I'm sorry, Ma'am, if you were alarmed, but I hope you'll take notice that I did n't go in until you gave me leave."

You see, the cunning fellow, by getting her permission, had secured himself against any legal consequences, so, if anything was done about it, only the three who first went in would suffer. They had suffered enough, as every one thought, so when Mr. Harrison came over that evening to explain and make apologies for his men, Nanny's father decided to accept the excuses and do nothing about it, except leave the pretty home, and take up his residence at a greater distance from the emotional salt-boilers.

But what about the pillow baby? Well, that's just what Nanny wanted to know. When they returned to the house, in fear and trembling lest one should still be hidden somewhere, they found that comfortable, pleasant

home, so neat and orderly an hour before, a shocking sight. Furniture overturned and broken, door panels smashed, beds pulled to pieces, clothes torn out of closets, bureau drawers dragged out, and dirt and footmarks everywhere. It looked as though a muddy-footed tornado had passed through.

By and by, when the excitement began to abate, Nanny thought of her darling pillow baby, and, reproaching herself for abandoning it, she ran down to the kitchen after it. No baby was there! Betty had n't seen it. The whole household was questioned, but it turned out that no one had seen the abandoned infant since it had left Nanny's arms. Whether the mob had carried it off, or whether, in the general confusion, the pillow had been returned to its legitimate use as a pillow, no one could tell; but, anyway, it could not be found, and Nanny was inconsolable.

That affectionate young woman was as much grieved as if it were a real baby. She curled up in a corner of a wide, old-fashioned

window-seat, behind a thick curtain — her favorite nook — and cried as though her heart would break. She believed her baby had been stolen by one of those horrid men, and she refused to be comforted, even when Mamma showed her the clothes her baby had worn at the time of the catastrophe (which mysteriously turned up in the soiled-clothes basket) and the pillow-case which had formed her fair skin, soiled and torn, with its penciled features quite trampled out.

To her the child was dead, — by violence and her carelessness, — and never again had she the heart to make up another pillow baby. The mere proposal from Molly would remind her of her bereavement and bring back her grief.

So with that unfortunate lost child she gave up forever the happiness of making pillow babies.

"I guess you once wrote a whole book about Nanny and Rob," said Kristy knowingly.

"I should n't wonder if I did," answered Uncle Will.

"Only you did n't call the girl Nanny," continued Kristy.

"Never mind, Kristy," interrupted Uncle Will.

"And I 've got a copy," went on Kristy, "and it 's a lovely book."

In the pause that followed, little Miss Wells, who sat leaning against the big tree-trunk that came up through the piazza, began to untie her parcel.

"You know," she said to Kristy, "that I can't tell a story. I can only read one."

"And write them," said Kristy, laughing. "I know what nice ones you can write, for I have a whole book full at home."

Miss Wells blushed a little, and Kristy went on eagerly, "Is it one of your own you will read, Miss Wells?"

"Yes," answered Miss Wells.

"And is that book full of your very own stories?" asked Kristy.

"Yes," again answered Miss Wells.

"Oh, goody!" cried Kristy; "then I know they 'll be splendid."

"Thank you, Kristy," said Miss Wells, with a smile, and then began.

CHAPTER XV

A MYSTERY IN THE KITCHEN

SOMETHING very mysterious was going on in the Jarvis kitchen. The table was covered with all sorts of good things — eggs and butter and raisins and citron and spices; and Jessie, with her sleeves rolled up and a white apron on, was bustling about, measuring and weighing and chopping and beating and mixing those various ingredients in a most bewildering way.

Moreover, though she was evidently working for dear life, her face was full of smiles; in fact, she seemed to have trouble to keep from laughing outright, while Betty, the cook, who was washing potatoes at the sink, fairly giggled with glee every few minutes, as if the sight of Miss Jessie working in the kitchen was the drollest thing in the world.

It was one of the pleasantest sights that

big, sunny kitchen had seen for many a day, and the only thing that appeared mysterious about it was that the two workers acted strangely like conspirators. If they laughed — as they did on the slightest provocation — it was very soft and at once smothered. Jessie went often to the door leading into the hall, and listened; and if there came a knock on the floor, she snatched off her apron, hastily wiped her hands, rolled down her sleeves, asked Betty if there was any flour on her, and then hurried away into another part of the house, trying to look cool and quiet, as if she had not been doing anything.

On returning from one of these excursions, as she rolled up her sleeves again, she said:

"Betty, we must open the other window if it is cold. Mamma thought she smelled roast turkey!"

Betty burst into a laugh which she smothered in her apron. Jessie covered her mouth and laughed too, but the window was opened to make a draught and carry out the delicious odors which, it must be confessed, did fill that

kitchen so full that no wonder they crept through the cracks and the keyholes, and hung about Jessie's dress as she went through the hall, in a way to make one's mouth water.

"What did ye tell her?" asked Betty, as soon as she could speak.

"Oh, I told her I thought pot-pie smelled a good deal like turkey," said Jessie, and again both laughed. "Was n't it lucky we had pot-pie to-day? I don't know what I should have said if we had n't."

Well, it was not long after that when Jessie lined a baking-dish with nice-looking crust, filled it with tempting-looking chicken legs and wings and breasts and backs and a bowlful of broth, laid a white blanket of crust over all, tucked it in snugly around the edge, cut some holes in the top, and shoved it into the oven just after Betty drew out a dripping-pan in which reposed, in all the glory of rich brown skin, a beautiful turkey. Mrs. Jarvis could n't have had any nose at all if she did n't smell that. It filled the kitchen full of nice smells, and Betty hurried it into

the pantry, where the window was open, to cool.

Then Jessie returned to the spices and fruits she had been working over so long, and a few minutes later she poured a rich, dark mass into a tin pudding-dish, tied the cover on tight, and slipped it into a large kettle of boiling water on the stove.

"There!" she said, "I hope that 'll be good."

"I know it will," said Betty, confidently. "That 's y'r ma's best receipt."

"Yes; but I never made it before," said Jessie, doubtfully.

"Oh, I know it 'll be all right, 'n' I 'll watch it close," said Betty; "'n' now you go 'n' sit with y'r ma. I want that table to git dinner."

"But I 'm going to wash all these things," said Jessie.

"You go long! I 'd ruther do that myself. 'T won't take me no time," said Betty.

Jessie hesitated. "But you have enough to do, Betty."

"I tell you I want to do it," the girl insisted.

"Oh, I know!" said Jessie; "you like to help about it. Well, you may; and I'm much obliged to you besides." And after a last look at the fine turkey cooling his heels (if he had any) in the pantry, Jessie went into the other part of the house.

When dinner-time arrived and Papa came from town, there duly appeared on the table the pot-pie before mentioned, and various other things pleasant to eat, but nothing was seen of the turkey so carefully roasted nor of the chicken pie nor of the pudding that caused the young cook so much anxiety. Nothing was said about them either, and it was not Thanksgiving nor Christmas, though it was only a few days before the former.

It was certainly odd, and stranger things happened that night. In the first place Jessie sat up in her room and wrote a letter; and then, after her mother was in bed and everything still, she stole down the back stairs with a candle, quietly as though she was doing some

mischief. Betty, who came down to help her, brought a box in from the wood-shed; and the two plotters, very silently, with many listenings at the door to see if any one was stirring, packed that box full of good things.

In it the turkey, wrapped in a snowy napkin, found a bed, the chicken pie and the plum pudding — beautiful-looking as Betty said it would be — bore him company; and numerous small things, jam jars, fruits, etc., etc., filled the box to its very top. Then the cover, provided with screws so that no hammering need be done, was fastened on.

"Now you go to bed, Miss Jessie," whispered Betty. "I'll wait."

"No, you must be tired," said Jessie. "I just as lief."

"But I'd ruther," said Betty, shortly, — "'n' I'm going to; it won't be long now."

So Jessie crept quietly upstairs, and before long there was a low tap on the kitchen door. Betty opened it, and there stood a man.

"Ready?" said he.

"Yes," answered Betty; "but don't speak

loud; Mis' Jarvis has sharp ears 'n' we don't want her disturbed. Here 's the card to mark it by," and she produced a card from the table.

The man put it in his pocket, shouldered the box, and Betty shut the door.

Not one of those good things ever went into the Jarvis dining-room!

The next morning things went on just as usual in the house. The kitchen door was left open and Mrs. Jarvis was welcome to smell any of the appetizing odors that wafted out into her room. Jessie resumed her study, and especially her practice, for she hoped some day to be a great musician. She waited on her mother and took charge of the housekeeping, so much as was necessary with the well-tried servant at the head of the kitchen. And though she had but sixteen years over her bright brown head, she proved herself to be what in that little New England town was called " capable."

But that box of goodies! let us see where it went.

It was Thanksgiving morning in a rough-looking little mining settlement in Colorado. In a shanty rougher and more comfortless than the rest, were two persons. One, a man of thirty, was deeply engaged in cleaning and oiling a gun which lay in pieces about him, on the rough bench where he sat; the other, a youth of sixteen, was trying to make a fire burn in the primitive-looking affair that did duty as a stove. Both wore coarse miner's suits, and picks and other things about the room told that their business was to dig for the yellow dust we are all so greedy to have.

Evidently luck had not been good, for the whole place appeared run down, and the two looked absolutely hungry.

It was Thanksgiving morning, as I said, but no thankfulness shone in the two pale, thin faces. Both were sad, and the younger one almost hopeless.

"Jack," said the elder, pausing in his operations, "mind you give that old hen a good boil, or we won't be able to eat it."

"It'll be better 'n' nothing, anyway, I suppose," said Jack, gloomily.

"Not much. 'Specially if you don't get the taste of sage bush out of it. Lucky I happened to get that shot at her anyway," he went on; "I 've seen worse dinners — even Thanksgiving dinners — than a sage hen."

"I have n't," said Jack, shortly; for the mention of Thanksgiving had brought up before him with startling vividness the picture of a bright dining-room in a certain town far away, a table loaded with good things, and surrounded by smiling faces, and the contrast was almost more than he could bear.

"Well, don't be down on your luck, boy, so long as you can get a good fat hen to eat, if she does happen to be too fond of seasoning before she 's dead!" replied the other, cheerfully; "we have n't struck it yet, but it 's always darkest just before dawn, you know. We may be millionaires before this time to-morrow."

"We may," answered Jack; but he did n't look as if he had much hope of it.

A few hours later the occupants of the cabin sat down to their Thanksgiving dinner. It consisted of the hen aforesaid, cut in pieces and boiled — looking very queer, too — served in the kettle in which the operation had been performed. The table was at one end of the bench, the table service two jack-knives and two iron spoons — absolutely nothing else.

The elder sat on the bench, the younger drew up a keg that had held powder, and the dinner was about to begin.

But that hen was destined never to be eaten, for just at that moment the door was pushed open in the rude way of the country, a box set down on the floor, and a rough voice announced:

"A box for Mr. Jack Jones."

Jack started up.

"For me! there must be a mistake! Nobody knows" — he stopped, for he had not mentioned that his name was assumed.

"Likely not!" said the man, with a knowing look, "but folks has a mighty queer way of findin' out," and he shut the door and left.

Jack stood staring at the box as if he had lost his wits. It could not be from home, for no one knew where he went when he stole out of the house one night six months ago, and ran away to seek his fortune. Not a line had he ever written, — not even when very ill, as he had been; not even when without a roof to cover his head, as he had been more than once; not even when he had not eaten for two days, as also, alas! had been his experience.

He had deliberately run away, because — how trivial it looked to him now! and how childish seemed his conduct! — because he thought his father too hard on him! would not allow him enough liberty! wanted to dictate to this man of sixteen! he intended to show him that he could get on alone.

Poor Jack! the only comfort he had been able to extract from his hard lot these many months of wandering, of work, of suffering such as he had never dreamed of — his only comfort was that his tender mother did n't know, his only sister would no more be wor-

ried by his grumbling and complaints, and his father would be convinced now that he was n't a baby. Small comfort, too, to balance the hardships that had fallen to his lot since the money he had drawn from the savings bank — his little all — was used up.

"Why don't you open it?" in the gruff but not unkind voice of his room-mate, whom he called Tom, aroused him. "Maybe there 's something in it better 'n sage hen," trying to raise a smile.

But no smile followed. Mechanically Jack sought the tools to open it, and in a few moments the cover was off.

It *was* from home! On the very top was a letter addressed to Jack Jarvis in a hand that he well knew.

He hastily stuffed it into his pocket unopened. The layers of paper were removed, and as each one was thrown off something new appeared. Not a word was spoken, but the kettle of sage hen was silently put on the floor by Tom as the bench began to fill up. A jar of cranberry sauce, another of orange

marmalade, oranges and apples, a plum pudding, a chicken pie, and lastly, in its white linen wrapper, the turkey we saw browning in that far-off New England kitchen.

As one by one these things were lifted out and placed on the bench a deep silence reigned in the cabin. Jack had choked at sight of the letter, and memories of days far different from these checked even Tom's usually lively tongue. A strange unpacking it was; how different from the joyful packing at dead of night with those two laughing girl faces bending over it!

When all was done, and the silence grew painful, Jack blurted out, "Help yourself," and bustled about, busily gathering up the papers and folding them, and stuffing them back in the box, as though he were the most particular housekeeper in the world. But if Jack could n't eat, something, too, ailed Tom. He said simply:

"Don't feel hungry. Believe I'll go out and see what I can find," and shouldering his gun, now cleaned and put together, he quickly went out and shut the door.

Jack sat down on the keg and looked at the things which so vividly brought home, and his happy life there, before him. He did not feel hungry either. He sat and stared for some time. Then he remembered his letter. He drew it from his pocket and opened it. It was very thick; and when he pulled it out of the envelope the first thing he saw was the smiling face of his sister Jessie, his twin sister, his playmate and comrade, his confidante from the cradle. The loss of her ever-willing sympathy had been almost more to him than all the rest of his troubles.

This was another shock that brought something to his eyes that made him see the others through a mist. There were the pictures of his mother, whose gentle voice he could almost hear, and of his father, whose gray hairs and sad face he suddenly remembered were partly his work.

At last he read the letter. It began: —

DEAR JACK, — I've just found out where you are, and I'm so glad. I send you this

Thanksgiving dinner. It was too bad for you to go off so. You don't know how dreadful it was for Mamma; she was sick a long time, and we were scared to death about her, but she's better now; she can sit up most all day.

Oh, Jack! Father *cried!* I'm sure he did, and he almost ran out of the room, and did n't say anything to anybody all day. But I was determined I'd find you. I shan't tell you how I did it, but Uncle John helped me, and now, Jack, he says he wants just such a fellow as you to learn his business, and he'll make you a very good offer. And, Jack, that's my turkey — my Winnie — and nobody but Betty knows anything about this box and this letter. I send you all my money out of the savings bank (I did n't tell *anybody* that), and *I want* you to come home. You'll find the money under the cranberries. I thought it would be safe there, and I knew you'd eat them all, you're so fond of cranberries. I did n't tell anybody because I want to surprise them, and besides, let them think you

came home because you got ready. It's nobody's business where you got the money, anyway.

Now do come right home, Jack. You can get here in a week's time, I know.

Your affectionate sister,

JESSIE.

Jack laid the letter down with a rush of new feelings and thoughts that overwhelmed him. He sat there for hours, he knew nothing of time. He had mechanically turned the cranberry jar upside down and taken from the bottom carefully wrapped in white paper, fifty dollars.

A pang went through him. Well did he know what that money represented to his sister; by how many sacrifices she had been saving it for a year or two, with the single purpose of taking the lessons from a great master that were to fit her to teach, to take an independent position in the world, to relieve her father, who had lost a large slice of his comfortable income, and who was growing

old and sad under his burden. She had often talked it over with Jack.

Now she had generously given up the whole to him, all her hopes and dreams of independence; and he — he who should have been the support of his sister, the right arm of his father — he had basely deserted.

These thoughts and many more surged through his mind that long afternoon, and when Tom returned as the shadows were growing long, he sat exactly as he had been left.

On Tom's entrance he roused himself. There was a new light in his eye.

"Come Tom," he said, "dinner 's waiting. You must be hungry by this time."

"I am that," said Tom, who had been through his own mental struggles meanwhile.

The two sat down once more to their Thanksgiving dinner, and this time they managed to eat, though Jack choked whenever he thought of tasting a bit of Jessie's pet turkey, Winnie; and much as he liked turkey, and a home turkey at that, he could not touch it.

After the meal, when the provisions were stored away in the cupboard (a soap box) much too small for such a supply, it had grown quite dark, and the two, still disinclined to talk, went to their beds — if the rough bunks they occupied may be dignified by that name.

But not to sleep — at least not Jack, who tumbled and tossed all night and got up in the morning with an energy and life he had not shown for weeks.

After breakfast Tom shouldered his pick and said:

"I 'll go on, Jack, while you clear up." Yet he felt in his heart he should never see Jack again; for there was a homestruck look in his face that the man of experience in the ways of runaway boys knew well.

He was not surprised that Jack did not join him, nor that when he returned at night to the cabin he found him gone and a note pinned up on the door:

"I can't stand it — I 'm off for home. You may have my share of everything.

"Jack."

It was a cold evening in early December, and there seemed to be an under-current of excitement in the Jarvis household. The table was spread in the dining-room with the best silver and linen. Mrs. Jarvis was better, and had even been able to go into the kitchen to superintend the preparations for dinner.

Jessie went around with a shining face that no one understood and she could not explain.

Betty was strangely nervous, and had made several blunders that morning which mortified the faithful servant very much. An air of expectancy pervaded the whole house, though the two heads of it had not a hint of the cause.

Jessie heard the train she had decided to be the important one. She could hardly contain herself for expectation. She tried hard to sober herself now and then by the thought, "Perhaps he won't come;" but she could n't stay sobered, for she felt as certain that he would as that she lived.

You all know how it happened. The door

opened and Jack walked in. One instant of blank silence, and then a grand convulsion.

Jack fell on his knees with his face in his mother's lap, though he had not thought a moment before of doing any such thing. Jessie hung over him, frantically hugging him. Mr. Jarvis, vainly trying to join this group, could only lay his hands on Jack's head and say in a broken voice: "My son! My son!" while Betty performed a war-dance around the party, wildly brandishing a basting-spoon in one hand and wiping her streaming eyes on the dish-cloth which she held in the other.

It was long before a word could be spoken, and the dinner was totally ruined, as Betty declared with tears (though they were not for sorrow), before any one could calm down enough to eat.

Then the reaction set in, and justice was done to the dinner while talk went on in a stream. Jack did not tell his adventures; he only said that he had come from the city, where he had made arrangements for a situa-

tion with Uncle John — at which Jessie's eyes sparkled. His looks, even after a week of comfort and hope, spoke for his sufferings.

There is little more to tell. Jack Jarvis at seventeen was a different boy from the Jack who at sixteen started out to seek his fortune. You may be sure that Jessie had her music lessons after all, and that a new Winnie with a fine young brood at her heels stalked about the Jarvis grounds the next spring.

For a moment after the story ended there was silence, and Kristy jumped up, ran over to Miss Wells, and kissed her, saying, "That Jessie was just lovely; I believe she was a real girl, and it really happened, did n't it?"

"Yes, dear; it is a true story," answered Miss Wells, handing her the book and the ribbon that had tied it.

"Now it 's Grandma's turn," said Kristy, turning to the corner where her grandmother sat knitting as usual, for she could never bear to have her hands idle.

"You 've dragged out of me long ago, my

dear, every story I ever knew," answered Grandmother, looking lovingly over to Kristy.

"Well, then tell an old one," said Kristy. "Your old ones are better than most folks' new ones. I don't mean you," she added hurriedly, as a laugh greeted her remark; "these stories have been splendid, every one — but you just listen to Grandma!"

"Right you are, my dear," said Mr. Anthony, "and we all agree with you too."

"Don't make me blush in my old age," said Grandmother. "What shall I tell you?"

"Tell about Grandmother Grand — that Indian story, you know."

"Well" — said Grandmother.

CHAPTER XVI

GRANDMOTHER GRAND

My Grandmother Grand was one of the pleasantest figures of my childhood. I can see her now, a grand and stately dame, erect and elegant, carrying herself like a queen till the day of her death, at ninety.

Her dress was always the same, for she never favored modern fashions. I remember I used to look with admiration at her feet, in daintiest of black silk stockings with embroidered clocks, and high-heeled slippers when everybody else wore shoes without heels.

Her black silk petticoat, or — as we should say — skirt, and short-gown of the same were of the best, and the white muslin kerchief around her neck was the finest to be had. Her abundant silvery hair was rolled back in waves on her head, and over it she wore a mob cap

with a double fluted ruffle, held in place by two gold pins. Around her neck she always wore a string of gold beads which it was my delight to look at and handle. She never took them off, day or night, but she promised them to me because I was named for her. I have them now, — great, solid things, that I wonder any one could endure to wear.

Her queer dress and her gold beads made her a really fairy grandmother to us youngsters, especially as we were taught to rise when she came into a room, to show respect for her.

This Grandmother Grand was better than any story-book, for her stories were all true, and if I can tell you one that we always begged for, with half the life she put into it, I 'm sure your hair will rise, and you will turn cold, as we always did.

You know nothing about Indians, nowadays, she would begin. Little can you imagine what it is to live year in and year out in deadly fear of an attack by merciless savages; to have every unusual sound strike terror into

your heart; to be prepared at any instant, night or day, to drop everything and run for your life. That's the way we lived when I was a girl, and bad as it was when all white people were united against the common foe, it was worse when the Revolution broke out. Then the settlers were divided among themselves, and your dearest friend or your nearest neighbor might suddenly become your worst enemy, ready to betray you to the Indians or the British, or even to rob and murder you himself. So bad are the passions roused by war.

I once had a fright from Indians — she would go on — that I can never forget. I was living with my brother in the northern part of New York State. The house was a queer little affair, very common then, but now only to be seen in the woods. It was built of logs, with few windows and those not large. Small as they were, they were further protected against Indians by blocks fitted to the inside, so that in case of danger the house could be turned in a few minutes into a re-

spectable log fort. The door was very heavy, to resist savages and other enemies, and the fastening was like that you read of in the story of Red-Ridinghood, a large wooden latch on the inside, lifted by pulling a string which was put through a hole, and hung down outside. At night the string was pulled inside, when the door could not be opened from without.

This house was snug and cosy inside, and there I lived with my brother, his wife, and their children. Of course my brother belonged to the Continental Army, and often we did not see him nor hear of him for weeks at a time. There was no telegraph at the time, you know, to carry news, no daily paper with items from all over the world, and no post-office conveniences, which are now so common that you can hardly conceive what it is to be without them.

The only way we heard from my brother was by special messenger, or by chance news from a neighbor who had heard, or by a traveler passing through. Even then reports

could not be trusted, and so when he went away, we bade him farewell, and at once put ourselves in a state of siege.

Every night the windows were blocked up, the lights carefully hidden, so as not to be seen by any prowling savage, and the only fire-arm the house contained, an old flint-lock musket, carefully inspected to see if it was in order for a surprise, and placed beside the door, where was a small hole to look through, and also to fire through, if necessary. Then we would creep into our beds, and get what sleep we could, excepting one, who was always left to watch and listen for danger.

When my brother was away this duty devolved entirely upon the women and the older girls. In the course of time the two armies moved about so that our house was exactly between them, General Burgoyne on one side, and General Gates on the other. Living then became harder than ever, since the common soldiers, and the Indians in the pay of the British, considered that they had a right to anything they chose to take, and helped them-

selves to whatever they liked, in the house or out of it.

They would come in any time day or night without so much as asking leave, take our dinner out of the pot, or blankets off our beds, and walk out, even laughing at our remonstrances. Of course the Indians were worse, or we were more afraid of them. Many a time we all stood trembling around in the corners, while some great savage redman, with ugly painted face, big rolling eyes, and long black hair hanging down his back, warmed himself at our fire, ate our food — what little there was, and looked through cupboards and chests, to see what we had that pleased his savage fancy.

Once I remember a real tragedy in my soul, when a big greasy Indian, half drunk and frightful to look at, spied among my treasures a doll. I had long ago ceased to play with dolls. When life is so serious and full of dangers young girls grow old fast.

But this was a precious relic of my childhood, and I valued it more than all the rest

of my possessions. It would look strange enough beside your grand French wax dolls, but it was very elegant then. Scarcely any girl had anything better than a rag doll. It had come to me from relatives in England, and was carved of wood, with a sweet painted face, and real hair.

It was dressed in stiff brocade satin, with narrow skirt, very short waist, and sleeves. It had a white turban of muslin on the head. I remember the details of the dress as if I had seen it yesterday.

When the Indian's great eyes fell upon this treasure, he was suddenly interested. He took it up in his dirty hands, and with many grunts of approval examined the dress, turning it around and inspecting it on all sides with great attention. Then with one word, which of course I could not understand, he coolly tucked my beloved Polly into his belt.

How my heart sank! I instinctively sprang forward to rescue her, but one glance of his wild eyes, as he laid his hand significantly upon his tomahawk, frightened me into silence.

I covered my face, and when I looked up he was gone and my beloved doll with him.

The next night it was my turn to watch, and I was sitting alone, thinking of my doll, and wondering where she was at that moment, when I heard footsteps outside. In an instant I was on the alert, listening with all my powers. It sounded like the guarded steps of several men, and my heart was in my mouth as I thought of our houseful of women and children, and only one gun to defend ourselves.

I slipped my feet out of my shoes and stole to the door, and put my ear to the peep-hole provided.

Yes, it was plainly men, and they were coming near the house. But it was men in shoes, and not the stealthy moccasined feet of savages. Thank God for that! Any civilized foe was preferable to them.

I listened silently, wakened Sister Mary, and then crept back to my place at the door.

I heard subdued voices, and at last a halt directly before the door. Then came a gentle tap and a low "Mary! are you awake?"

A great sense of relief swept over me. It was my brother! To make certain, and guard against tricks however, I answered back through the hole, in a whisper, "Who are you?"

"It is I, sister! Open the door!"

"Yes, open it!" said Sister Mary, as I hesitated; "I know his voice."

I lifted the latch and opened the door slightly, while my brother and four soldiers filed in, and then I closed and fastened it as before.

Soon we had a light, and then my brother told us he had come with the men to move us away, and we must go the next day, because he could not be away long, and besides there were rumors of an attack at any moment.

He said we had better try to sleep the rest of the night. The soldiers stretched themselves before the fire on the floor, and we did try to sleep, but we really spent the night in exciting talk over the events of the war, home news and the future.

Early the next morning we were up, and preparing to go. We had but one wagon, the horses long ago given to the army, and into that vehicle must be put all we should save of household goods, for we well knew that the house once abandoned, would become a stable, or whatever happened to be most convenient for the lawless soldiers.

Big Indian baskets were brought out. Great round or square things, made of bark, with covers, and capable of holding a bushel.

Now in one corner of the house, to keep them away from marauders, we had a large family of hens. To carry them was impossible, to leave them to feast the enemy was repugnant to our feelings. We decided to make them all into a huge pot-pie, and to have one full meal before we started.

Accordingly every feather-top was laid low, greatly to the grief of all the children, the big kettle was hung upon the crane in the great fireplace, and Dinah was very busy getting ready. Soon a delicious odor began to pervade the house, and at last packing was

nearly done, and the pot-pie, in a big pan, was steaming away on the table.

The hungry household gathered around, soldiers and all, in pleasing anticipation of a feast. The long grace had been said, and my brother dipped a ladle into the dish.

At that instant the latch flew violently up, the door burst open, and a friendly neighbor threw himself in, falling full length on the floor, crying earnestly between his gasps for breath,

"For God's sake! run! the Indians!"

We were on our feet in an instant, and I ran to the door. Oh, children! I can never forget what I saw at that moment! I often see it in my sleep to this day.

Opposite our house on an island in the river was a house, the home of friends. I saw that house on fire surrounded by yelling savages, Mrs. Osborne running for her life, and close behind her an immense Indian with tomahawk raised — and — and — I cannot tell you more!

I turned away sick and ready to faint. But I did not faint; I thought of our baby sleep-

ing quietly on the bed. I ran across the room, snatched up the precious bundle, blanket and all, and ran madly out the back door, calling to my brother, "I 'll go ahead with baby."

The rest of the family were hastily hurried into the wagon, and a straw bed flung in for Sister Mary, who was ill. The soldiers took hold of the pole, and away they went into the woods behind the house.

Nobody thought of that pot-pie left smoking on the table for our terrible enemies. No doubt they grunted approval, surrounded the table, and dipped their fingers into the pan till every morsel was eaten.

I had gone far ahead with my dear burden in my panic, when it suddenly occurred to me that baby slept wonderfully well. I stopped — lifted the cover — and O God! it was not the baby: it was a bundle of clothes!

Then the baby was left! it was too late to go back! *I* had done it!

For the only time in my life I uttered a shriek of despair, and sank to the ground. That moment's agony I cannot describe. The

world turned cold and black, and I really believe I was losing my senses.

My brother's voice aroused me.

"Sister, be still!" he said sternly. "What is the matter?"

"The baby!" I gasped; "he is left behind!"

"It cannot be!" he said hoarsely, as white as death, and hastened back to where the wagon was slowly dragging along.

Again I was lost and unconscious, with a terrible feeling that the world was slipping away from me; but in a few moments my brother, as the best cure for my critical state, placed in my arms the laughing, crowing baby himself.

The relief was so sudden that I was instantly roused, and a violent burst of tears relieved my brain, and saved me from going mad.

The baby himself did not approve of this greeting, and set up a frightened cry, when my brother returned him to the wagon, and I tried to go on. But I found myself so weak-

ened by my excitement that I could not stand alone, and I was obliged to be added to the already heavy load in the wagon.

Through the woods we jolted till it began to grow dark, and we found that a storm was coming up. By that time we were in deep woods, and my brother decided to camp for the night.

The straw bed was taken out of the wagon and laid on the ground for the sick mother, and the wagon-box turned upside down over her for a sort of roof.

That was a night of horrors that you cannot imagine. We dared not have a fire because of Indians; we had nothing to eat but a little coarse dry bread. A severe thunder-storm drenched us through, crouched together in a heap on the wet ground. And then in that most dreadful night of our lives, homeless, cold, hungry, in terror of wild beasts on one side, and wilder savages on the other, the sick mother came very near to death.

The next morning, seeing her a little revived, my brother went on to find help and a

team to get us out. We stayed hidden there in such misery, suffering, and terror as I hope you will never know.

On the third day he returned with horses, and we went to a settlement where the best house was owned by a rich man, who had been a friend, but being a Tory was now a bitter enemy.

My brother could not believe that old friendship was all dead, and that he would not be at least decently hospitable in our desperate condition. So he drove up to the door and to host and hostess told his story, pleading our need of help.

The man turned away without a word, but the woman spoke with a haughty toss of the head.

"I would n't turn away a dog that was starving," she said, "but if any of that party want anything to eat, they must take it out of the swill pail! Swill is good enough for rebels!" and she went in and closed the door.

We were turning away, though well aware

that the people all took their cue from this family, and if they turned us away no one would help us; but some of the old black servants came to us, and begged us to come into the kitchen and rest and eat. And so desperate were our circumstances that we accepted the hospitality of the kitchen.

Those kind-hearted creatures brought out the pail, for they dared not disobey the letter of their mistress's words, scoured it till it shone, inside and out, and then filled it with milk for the half-starved children, and afterwards with more solid food for the older ones.

This gave us strength to go on till we reached another settlement, where we had friends, and the King of England had none. There we remained for some years before it was safe to go back to the scene of that day's horror.

There was a moment of silence when Grandmother finished. Every one was thinking of those terrible times, when Kristy burst out triumphantly, —

"There! didn't I tell you Grandmother could tell the best story of all! I like that story so much, but I always do long to know what it was that Grandmother Grand saw that time."

"It 's much better that you should n't know it," said Uncle Will, "those savages were capable of such fiendish acts as you happily cannot conceive of."

As Uncle Will paused, Kristy looked around on the silent and deeply interested party.

"I believe," said she earnestly, feeling that she had made a great discovery, — "I believe that every one of you likes stories as well as I do!"

The audience looked around at each other in almost a shame-faced way, and Uncle Tom spoke up bluntly: "I believe we do, little girl, only we 're not quite so honest as you in owning to it."

Now that the last story was told and her table covered with pretty packages, tied up with ribbons of many hues, Kristy began to untie them, and Uncle Tom began teasingly, —

"Now, Miss Kristy, what are you going to say about *our* Surprise Party? Are we even with you? Do you think you'll impose on us again?"

"Indeed I shall!" cried Kristy, with shining eyes. "I've been planning it; I'll have a Surprise Party every single birthday till I'm gray as grandma. Next year I'll invite you all to my home in the city, and I warn you to think up the best story you ever knew."

Just then the door flew open and out came a procession, old Nancy the cook at the head with a great dish of ice cream, followed by all the maids loaded down with cakes and fruit and dishes.

Then there was busy work. From a big table Aunt Lu served the cream, while Uncle Will and Uncle Tom carried it around, and the maids followed with the other goodies, including a dish of particularly nice candies made by Aunt Lu's own hands.

Kristy wanted to help serve, but she was sternly replaced on her seat by her uncles,

who told her she was the guest of the day, and must be served instead.

After all was over, and the guests had gone back down the hill, Kristy drew a long sigh, and said to Aunt Lu, "This is the most lovely birthday I ever had, and I'll tell you what I'm going to do with all these books: I'm going to put them all together in a little hanging shelf over the table in my room, and I'm going to get Mamma to paint over the shelf, 'My Birthday Surprise.' Every book shall be tied around with its own ribbon, with the bow on the back. I must be careful not to get them mixed. Won't it be lovely, Aunt Lu?"